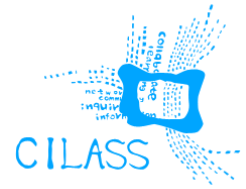


Inquiry-based Learning Design Overview

Learning Package for *Torquemada en la hoguera*



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1. The students and the curriculum

Level: 2

Module: HSS 264, 'The Novels of Benito Pérez Galdós'

Number: 31 students

2. The teaching and learning aims

The project built on previous experience of teaching Benito Pérez Galdós's novel *Torquemada en la hoguera* (1889) and aimed to make innovative use of ICT by producing an electronic learning package to support student inquiries into the electronic edition of the text. The electronic edition, produced by the Galdós Editions Project, was published by HriOnline (<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/galdos>) in May 2005 and has been described as 'an extremely valuable and significant online resource' and 'an absolute credit to the University of Sheffield and to its enlightened research outlook'.

Overall the module aims to explore the work of Benito Pérez Galdós, one of Spain's greatest fictional writers, and to improve students' ability to read and evaluate major works of nineteenth-century Spanish fiction using a variety of research tools. Within this framework, the IBL activities aim:

- To allow students to confidently and critically engage in inquiry-based learning;
- To involve students directly in the challenges presented by the study of *Torquemada en la hoguera*, through the use of the interactive electronic edition,
- To maximise the opportunities offered by research-led teaching by enabling the students to work like researchers;
- To stimulate students to develop new ways of reading the literary texts;
- To improve students' information literacy and collaborative learning skills.

3. The inquiry/ inquiries

Although this class has always encouraged active involvement on the part of students, and has featured research-led content, it was felt that students could benefit further from being more actively involved and from gaining hands-on experience with new technology. Students used to work on problem-solving tasks on paper handouts; it seemed a natural step forward to provide these exercises in electronic form in a learning package that would complement the electronic edition. This was done via several methods:

1. Rendering (in a more systematic and digestible format) in electronic form the information currently presented to students as worksheets and encouraged them to tackle additional tasks, such as:
 - Analysing the presentation of a particular character by using the character indexes;
 - Studying the significance of particular words / themes by using the search mechanism of the demo;
 - Examining the significance of the setting (by using the place index).

2. Students were also asked to critically reflect on their initial interpretations of the literary work (e.g. through personal diaries and interactions within their own group) and critically appraise the work of other groups.

4. *The assessment*

Instead of a compulsory assessed essay, students were given the option of undertaking a new form of assessment for the module. For example, students who were not comfortable with writing essays given the opportunity to produce a character study based upon their diaries.

5. *The 'process support'*

The inquiry process was supported by a combination of collaborative seminars and an electronic learning package, which was deployed in class and encouraged students to work independently outside of the classroom.

The learning package worked extremely well and the level at which the questions were pitched was judged to be fine. The package was designed in such a way that the questions became more challenging as the course progressed, but the students did not seem to notice this because their confidence improved throughout and they were thus more favourably disposed towards greater challenges as time went on. Students not only attempted to answer the questions that had been posed by the module leader, but engaged in class discussions and asked each other questions.

6. *The information resources and strategies*

The bulk of the information about the inquiries and the process was provided via the electronic learning package. The electronic edition of the text gave the students access to the primary source materials. The course leader attended the collaborative workshops and provided information where necessary.

7. *The tutoring/facilitation approach*

The course leader had a much less 'dominant' role in the collaborative workshop classes (to the extent that she was initially very concerned that the students were not getting enough support), instead taking on much more of a facilitative approach. The collaborative nature of much of the work and the accessibility of the electronic resources (learning package and edition) meant that the students were able to support each other and to consult the relevant resources when 'stuck'.

8. *The learning technology*

The module was supported by a range of technological resources, primarily the learning package and electronic edition of Galdos's text. Both were made available inside the institution's virtual learning environment. Discussion boards were used in order to encourage reflection and collaborative interactions. The collaborative workshops were held in CILASS's technology-rich learning spaces, which were essential to the success of the module.

9. *The learning spaces*

Teaching took place in the CILASS teaching space in Bartolomé House. The module leader and the students were both very enthusiastic about these spaces, especially when compared to more traditional lecture theatres. This was because the class would not have been able to gain hands-on use of the electronic package – as they did in every class which was held there – without the space.

10. *What really worked*

The module leader felt that the students benefited enormously from both the materials and the class sessions themselves. Highlights include:

- **Learning Package.** The package provided the students with an excellent opportunity to gain hands-on experience as researchers studying the electronic edition. It made students more confident, and more inclined to speak up during class discussions. The look and presentation of the package were really professional – they look absolutely fantastic on the screen. One of the sessions on *Torquemada* was

peer-reviewed by a colleague, who wrote, "I was immensely impressed by the quality of the electronic resources that had been prepared and made available to the students. This seemed to me to facilitate independent student learning in an exemplary manner."

- **Inquiry-based Learning.** Somewhat surprisingly (and pleasingly), the students seemed to grasp the significance of IBL in developing disciplinary skills that could be used elsewhere in their studies: 'I think this text has stuck out because I've got a lot more involved with the text. Skills I have learnt from studying this text will help with other books' (student feedback). One student noted that the module entailed 'Personal investigation' instead of 'spoon feeding.' Every student had the opportunity to play an active role in the classes and they were certainly not the passive listeners that they might be in other lectures, as they were required to get involved. Learning in this fashion helped students to think creatively and they generated some new ideas.
 - o 'The sessions enabled me to play an active role in learning about the novel [...]'
 - o 'I think IBL is a good idea because it encourages us to ask questions and this promotes self-learning etc.'
 - o '[...] a lot more people contributed to group discussions'
 - o 'It felt to me as if people had made an effort with this module.'
 - o 'I think inquiry based learning is a good idea because it encourages us to ask questions and this promotes self learning etc. However, it might have been better if we also had traditional style lectures to compliment our learning.'
- **Collaborative Working.** The students particularly enjoyed the collaborative nature of the sessions. It seems that group work also reduced some of the pressure on the students and helped them to think creatively.
 - o 'It was fairly low pressure working in groups, which was good.'
 - o 'Group work helped me to understand the different interpretations of the novel.'
 - o 'It has been good to generate various opinions on the topic.'
 - o 'It's always good to see things from someone else's point of view.'
 - o 'A good chance for group work that you don't get with lectures.'
 - o 'A lot more people contributed to group discussions.'
 - o 'It is definitely better to work in a group and share ideas cos everyone takes a different stance on the novel.'
- **A New Mode of Literary Inquiry.** The project has enabled the module leader to take a step forward in ascertaining how effectively ICT can be used in conjunction with literary studies. This new style of learning received a favourable response:
 - o 'The different approach to studying a text is very refreshing.' '[It's] a brilliant way to study a book' and 'I have enjoyed it a lot and think it has been very worthwhile.'
 - o 'I feel this was a very interesting and useful way to study this module. I think it helped reinforce the story and ideas into my head.'
 - o 'I think this text has stuck out because I've got a lot more involved with the text. Skills I have learnt from studying this text will help with other books.'
 - o 'It was a different way of studying a novel interactively, instead of just reading and writing.'
 - o 'I think it's an excellent realistic portrayal and there is much more to be learnt, and the computers aid the exploration of the book.'
- **Disciplinary skills.** One of the module leader's main goals was to encourage students to see that when reading Galdós's novel, there is often no right/ wrong answer since every interpretation is valid; her feedback states: 'I definitely felt that the students worked this out for themselves and were able to respect others' views, even though they might not agree with them. Some of their essays also challenged my views of the novel!'
- **Technology.** Using electronic resources (which provide students with all the information that they might need but without overwhelming them) ensures that students have the necessary tools to enable them to move onto a 'higher level' of learning, to pose (and answer) research questions. The module leader asks: 'Is it possible that when they feel 'comfortable' with the material that they have, students are more inclined to move out of their comfort zone, think creatively, engage in inquiry-based learning and explore uncharted territory?' Student comments include:
 - o 'Excellent. The technology really helped me get to grips with the detail of the novel, and helped me to think about the issues. I learnt loads!'

- 'I think it has been very helpful, it has made learning more engaging, and it's good to be able to use the WebCT resources at home as well.'
- 'The sessions enabled me to play an active role in learning about the novel and working with others was enjoyable.'
- '[The technology] makes the lessons more fun so you learn more as you're sharing ideas with others.'

11. Things to build on and/or do differently next time around

The main constraints on the process were practical, mainly connected to technical issues (and student reactions to these).

- Although the majority of students responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to use the electronic edition and learning package, the exercises took them much longer to complete than anticipated. Some students also had a few problems getting their computers set up and this slowed the classes down at the beginning. (However, they did get into the swing of it towards the end). One student wrote: 'It's a very good idea in theory, but in practice I felt it tended to slow the lessons down.' The following comment was fairly typical, 'At first the technology got in the way, but ultimately was very helpful in looking for and answering questions.'

In the future, the module leader hopes to work on the following:

1. Experiment with group work elements e.g. try to get parallel group sessions running; reduce the number of laptops (so students have to share and work in real groups, rather than pairs).
2. Integrate diaries and discussion boards more effectively. The students did not use the discussion board which might have deepened their inquiries outside class. Some used the diaries but in a somewhat haphazard fashion – i.e. as electronic notebooks, rather than to record their reflections.
3. Modify assessment to suit the learning process.
4. Share experiences with others and continue to learn from them.

12. Advice to others doing a similar project

Short term pain is long term gain?!

13. Further comments

The project seems to have had a positive impact across the department, which demonstrated a keen interest in the work and encouraged the efforts to link teaching and research throughout. The broad outline of the learning package may be replicated elsewhere for other MOLE module sites.