Calling Students to Adventure

Using the hero's journey as a tool for curriculum planning and reviewing course design

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Images by Amy Rose and Adam Watkins (Staffordshire University)

"Is your course like a journey, a parable, a game, a museum, a romance, a concerto, an Aristotelian tragedy, an obstacle course, one or all or some of the above?"
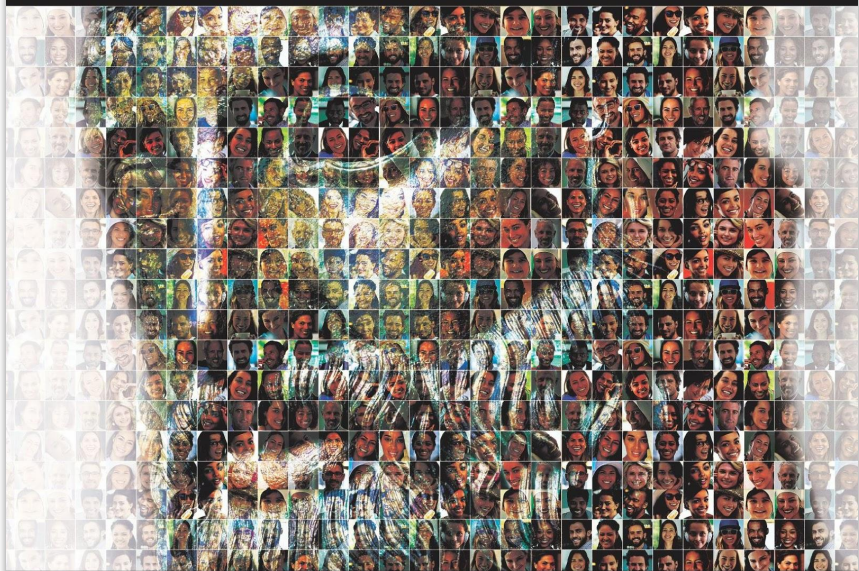
Ken Bain (2004) What the Best College Teachers Do. Harvard University Press, p.186
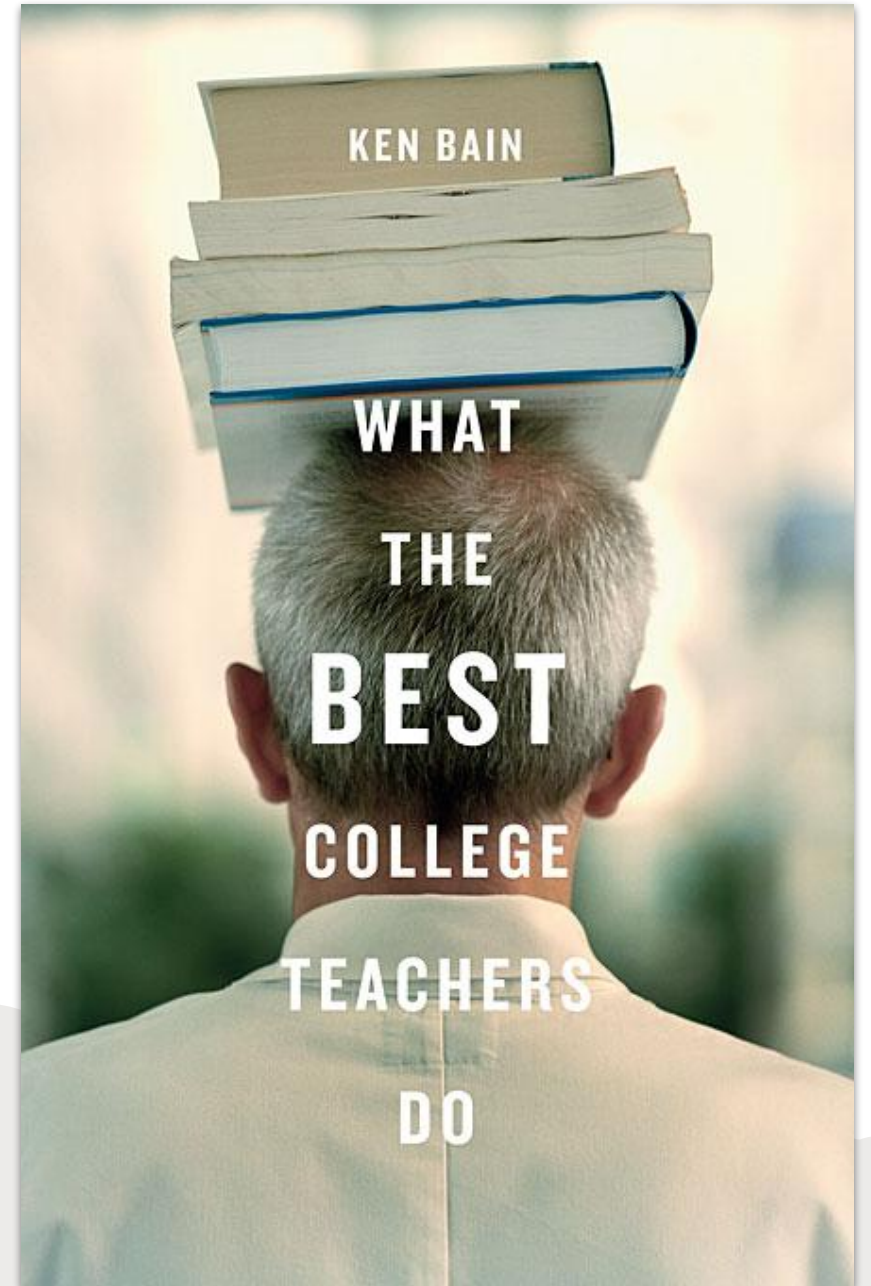
Collected Works

Joseph Campbell®

THE HERO WITH
A THOUSAND FACES

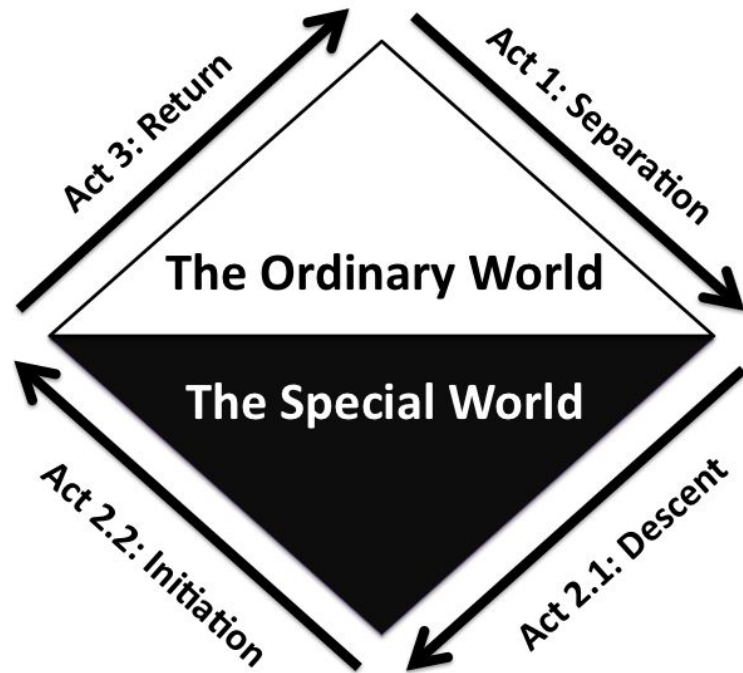
THE WRITER'S JOURNEY
Mythic Structure for Writers
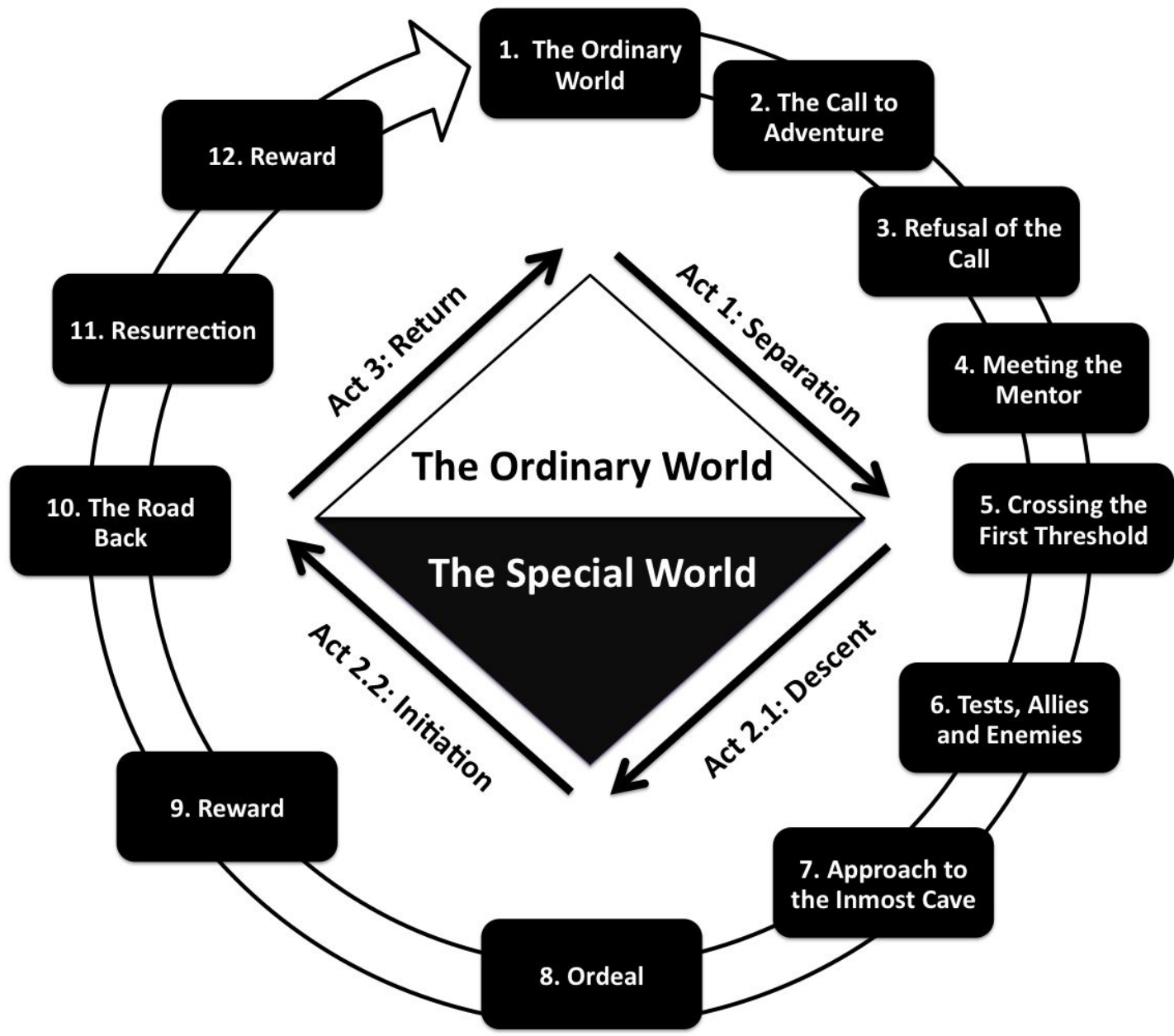### Third Edition

Christopher Vogler

The Ordinary World

The Special World

1. The Ordinary World
2. The Call to Adventure
3. Refusal of the Call
4. Meeting the Mentor
5. Crossing the First Threshold
6. Tests, Allies and Enemies
7. Approach to the Inmost Cave
8. Ordeal
9. Reward
10. The Road Back
11. Resurrection
12. Reward

Act 1: Separation
Act 2.1: Descent
Act 2.2: Initiation
Act 3: Return

The Twelve Stages of the Hero's Journey

1. The hero is introduced to us in their ordinary, everyday world (stage i).
2. A call to adventure is heard (stage ii),
3. … which is then refused (stage iii).
4. The hero meets their mentor, who encourages them to accept the call to adventure (stage iv).
5. The hero then crosses the threshold into the special world (stage v),
6. … where they find allies, encounter enemies and are tested in various ways (stage vi).
7. They journey deep into the special world, eventually coming to the innermost cave (stage vii),
8. … where they endure the ordeal (stage viii).
9. Having survived the ordeal, they are rewarded (stage ix),
10. … and start on the road back to the special world (stage x).
11. On the road back the hero encounters the final and often most dangerous series of tests, often surviving a close encounter with death in which they are symbolically resurrected (stage xi).
12. Finally the hero returns to back to their ordinary world, transformed by their journey, usually bearing magical treasures (stage xii).

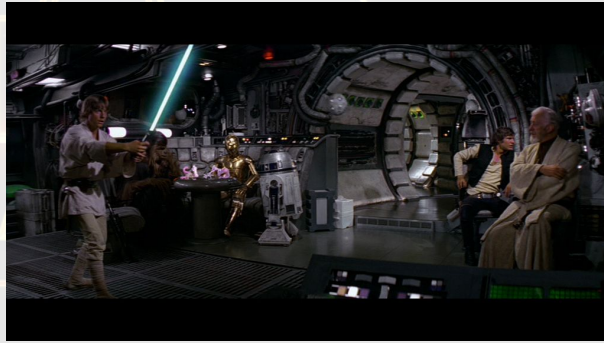i) The hero is introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD
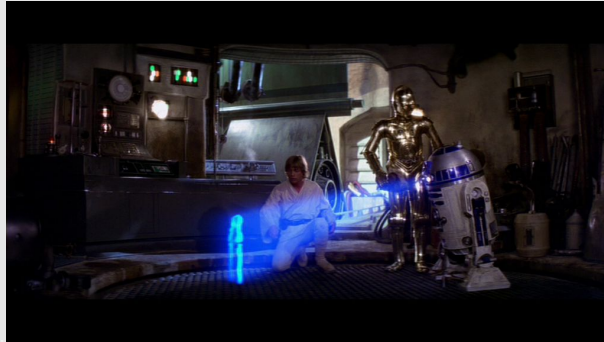
ii) The CALL TO ADVENTURE

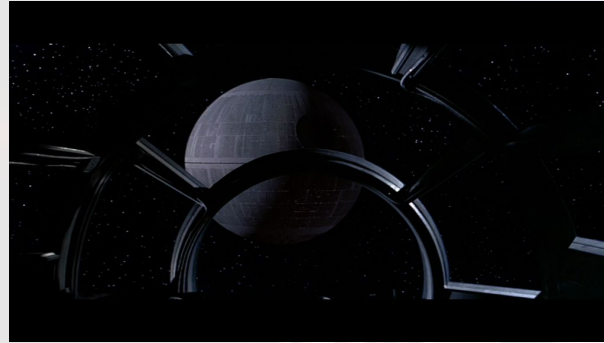iv) The hero is encouraged by the Wise Old Man or Woman (MEETING WITH THE MENTOR)

iii) The hero is reluctant at first (REFUSAL OF THE CALL)
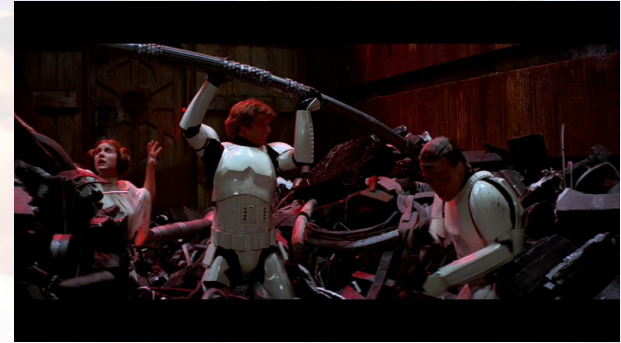
v) The hero passes the first threshold (CROSSING THE THRESHOLD)

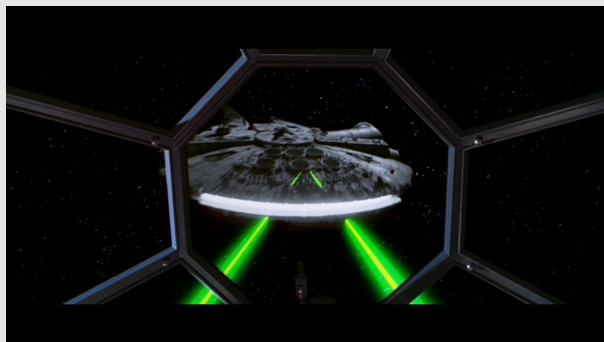vi) The hero encounters tests and helpers (TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES)

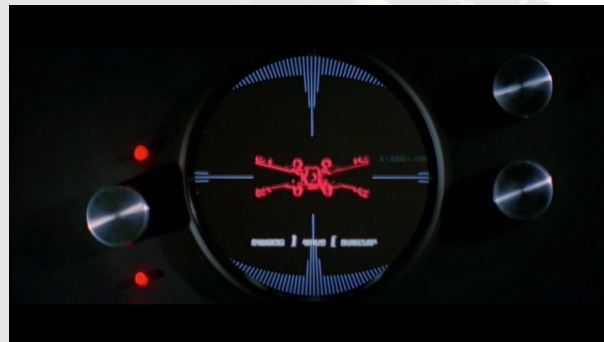vii) The hero reaches the innermost cave (APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE)

viii) The hero endures the supreme ORDEAL

ix) The hero seizes the sword (SEIZING THE SWORD, REWARD)
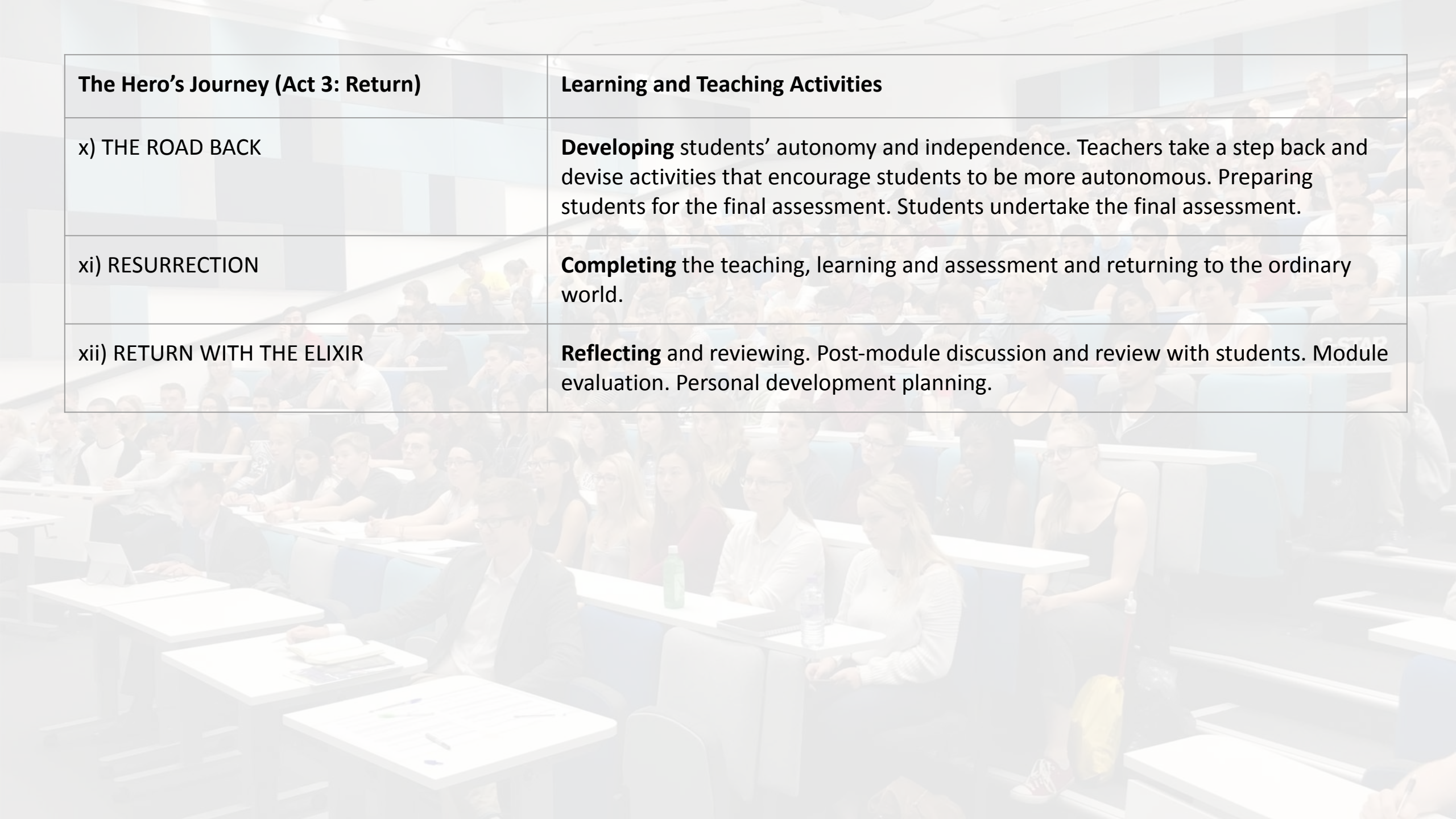
x) THE ROAD BACK

xi) RESURRECTION

xii) RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR

The Hero's Journey (Act 1: Separation)	Learning and Teaching Activities
i) The hero is introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD	**Establishing** the foundations upon which a community of learning can be built. Getting to know one another. Creating a safe and supportive learning environment.
ii) The CALL TO ADVENTURE	**Inviting** students to study. 'Selling' the course and the way that it will be taught. Seeking commitments and explaining what is expected of students. Explaining the promise of the module, the aims and purpose of the module, what will be learned, how the module will be taught. Discussing the learning outcomes and module assessments.
iii) The hero is reluctant at first (REFUSAL OF THE CALL)	**Listening** to students' hopes and fears for the module. Encouraging students to ask questions and voice their concerns. Learning incomes.
iv) The hero is encouraged by the Wise Old Man or Woman (MEETING WITH THE MENTOR)	**Motivating**, reassuring and encouraging students by responding to their fears and concerns.
v) The hero passes the first threshold (CROSSING THE THRESHOLD)	**Beginning** the teaching and learning.

The Hero's Journey (Act 2.1: Descent)	Learning and Teaching Activities
vi) The hero encounters tests and helpers (TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES)	**Introducing** students to the subject via a series of short, formative tasks, tests and rapid feedback. Challenging students' mental models of reality. Tutor and peer feedback. Group tasks and collective feedback. Self-assessment and self-evaluation. Introducing students to support services.
vii) The hero reaches the innermost cave (APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE)	**Preparing** students for the mid-module assessment.

The Hero's Journey (Act 2.2: Initiation)	Learning and Teaching Activities
viii) The hero endures the supreme ORDEAL	**Assessing** how well the students are doing. Assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning. Completing the mid-module assessment.
ix) The hero seizes the sword (SEIZING THE SWORD, REWARD)	**Engaging** students in tasks that require them to make use of the feedback and feed forward from the mid-module summative assessment.

The Hero's Journey (Act 3: Return)	Learning and Teaching Activities
x) THE ROAD BACK	**Developing** students' autonomy and independence. Teachers take a step back and devise activities that encourage students to be more autonomous. Preparing students for the final assessment. Students undertake the final assessment.
xi) RESURRECTION	**Completing** the teaching, learning and assessment and returning to the ordinary world.
xii) RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR	**Reflecting** and reviewing. Post-module discussion and review with students. Module evaluation. Personal development planning.

i) The hero is introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD
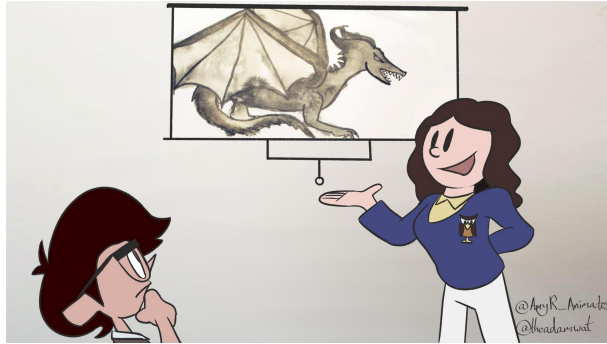
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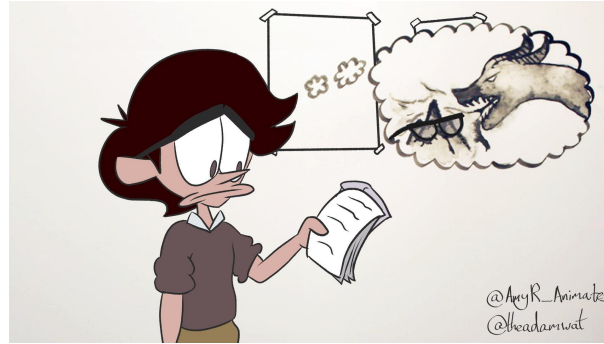
iii) The hero is reluctant at first (REFUSAL OF THE CALL)

iv) The hero is encouraged by the Wise Old Man or Woman (MEETING WITH THE MENTOR)

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ix) The hero seizes the sword (SEIZING THE SWORD, REWARD)

x) THE ROAD BACK

xi) RESURRECTION

xii) RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR

Stage i) The hero is introduced in their ORDINARY WORLD

When students begin a university unit they embark on a journey to a special world, a world that is not entirely familiar to them. They begin the unit without the full range of words, concepts, knowledge, skills and abilities that they need to successfully navigate through this new terrain. From the teacher's perspective it is helpful to understand the students in their ordinary world, as they will bring their own experiences, abilities and attitudes to learning to the classroom. Practically speaking, this is the point in the unit where the teacher and the students get to know one another, and which will involve various 'getting to know you' activities.

Stage i) The hero is introduced in their ORDINARY WORLD

Diagnostic questions for stage i):

- How well do you know the students at this point in their journey? Do you know their names? Do they know each other? If not, have you included icebreaking/getting to know you activities?
- Is there information that students need to bring to this unit (such as prerequisite modules)?
- Have they been informed of this requirement?
- Do you know what the level of knowledge about the subject at hand is with the students (i.e., their learning incomes)? Do you include activities to find out?
- Do you know which examples they will be familiar with? Are you familiar with the same examples? If no, do the students have the opportunity to teach you about them? Do you need to put something in place to make sure they are familiar with your examples?
- If you feel that any of the students is not sufficiently up-to-speed, what can you do about this? How will you get them to a point where they can meaningfully engage with the unit?

Stage ii) The CALL TO ADVENTURE
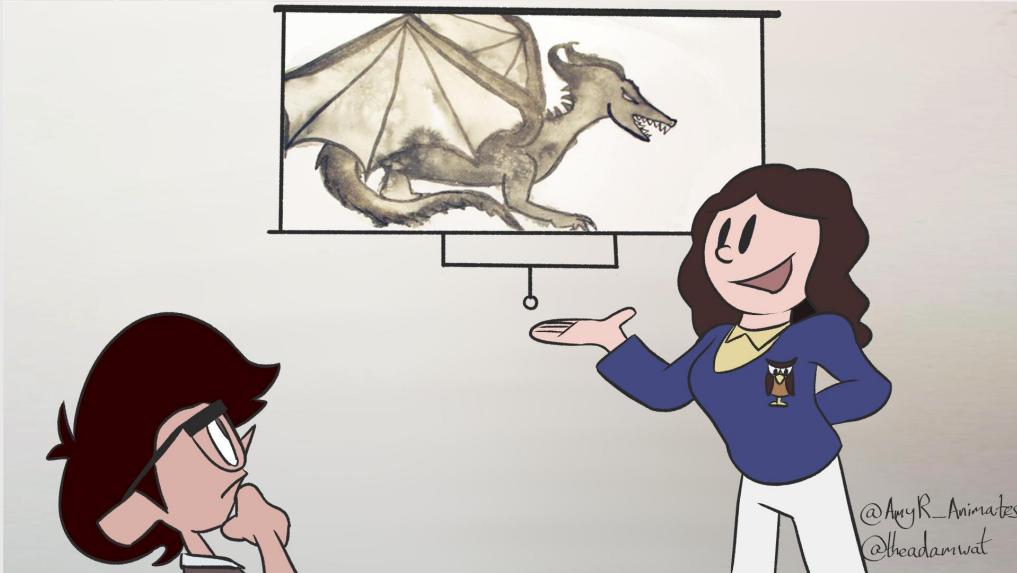
The students are presented with a problem, challenge or adventure. This is the new subject that they are required to understand, the new skills they have to master, and the new knowledge that they need to make sense of and incorporate into their existing knowledge structures. In practice, this point in the journey will be about presenting the unit to the students – setting out the aims and purpose, what they will learn, how they will be taught, what is expected of them, the intended learning outcomes and the assessments (if appropriate). It may be about explaining the dangers and likely pitfalls that may crop up on the adventure, but there should be a strong focus on the rewards of the journey too.

Stage ii) The CALL TO ADVENTURE

Diagnostic questions for stage ii):

- What will your students be able to do as a result of studying this unit with you?
- What are the big/major/important questions that will this unit raise, or that this unit is designed to help students answer?
- What is the core challenge/promise/intended learning outcome for this unit?
- How is the challenge/promise of the unit presented to the students? Do you clearly brief them on it, or is it somewhat hidden? If you choose to hide it, what is the reason for it?
- How are you setting expectations – do you clearly state what is expected of students? Do you start with a task that 'talks the talk'? (And if you do, do you explain to the student in retrospect?)
- Does this unit contain tasks and/or assessments? (If not, how will you know that your students are learning?) Are these formative or summative? How do you explain to the students what they should be doing, how they get feedback on it and how and if it gets judged (and by whom)?
- Do you explain or model the journey as a whole and explain how this unit fits into it?
- Do you explain your teaching philosophy (your approach to teaching) to students? (Why have you chosen to teach in the way that you do, and what evidence do you have that your teaching approach works? Have you written, or might you consider writing, a teaching philosophy statement?)
- If you're adopting a pedagogical strategy or approach to teaching with which students may be unfamiliar, how do you explain or 'sell' this to your students?

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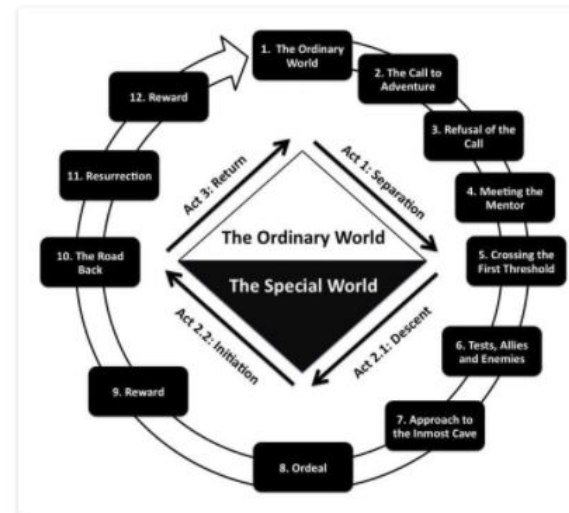
Introduction

"Is your course like a journey, a parable, a game, a museum, a romance, a concerto, an Aristotelian tragedy, an obstacle course, one or all or some of the above?"*

The 'student experience' and the 'student journey' are at the forefront of contemporary Higher Education, which is much more seen as an individually transformational endeavour than the simple collection of knowledge it once was. In this context it has become more and more important to consider the role and agency of students as part of learning and teaching planning, rather than just focus on content that is to be mysteriously transmitted. We suggest that it is worth considering the framework provided by the hero's journey, a model coming out of scriptwriting, as a guiding principle behind planning new and reflecting on old learning and teaching design. In so doing, educators can provide a fresh look at their courses and modules and truly put the individual student front and centre of their own learning journey, by casting them in the role of hero. The somewhat simple formula of the hero who encounters many obstacles on their journey, and returns to the ordinary world transformed, and often with some kind of magical boon, can easily be read as the student who encounters many obstacles and tests on their journey through university (but more specifically through subject knowledge/content/skills), and (hopefully) returns to the ordinary world (or the 'real world' outside of the realm of academia) transformed, with the 'magical' boon of subject knowledge and relevant skills to their chosen discipline.

Activity

1. Visit our 'Calling Students to Adventure' website and read the diagnostic questions for some or all of the stages.

Make a note of which questions you liked and didn't like.

https://mypad.northampton.ac.uk/hero/

2. On this Padlet wall, record which diagnostic questions you liked, didn't like, didn't understand, etc. You can 'like' and comment on other people's posts too.

https://uon1.padlet.org/robert_farmer3/journey
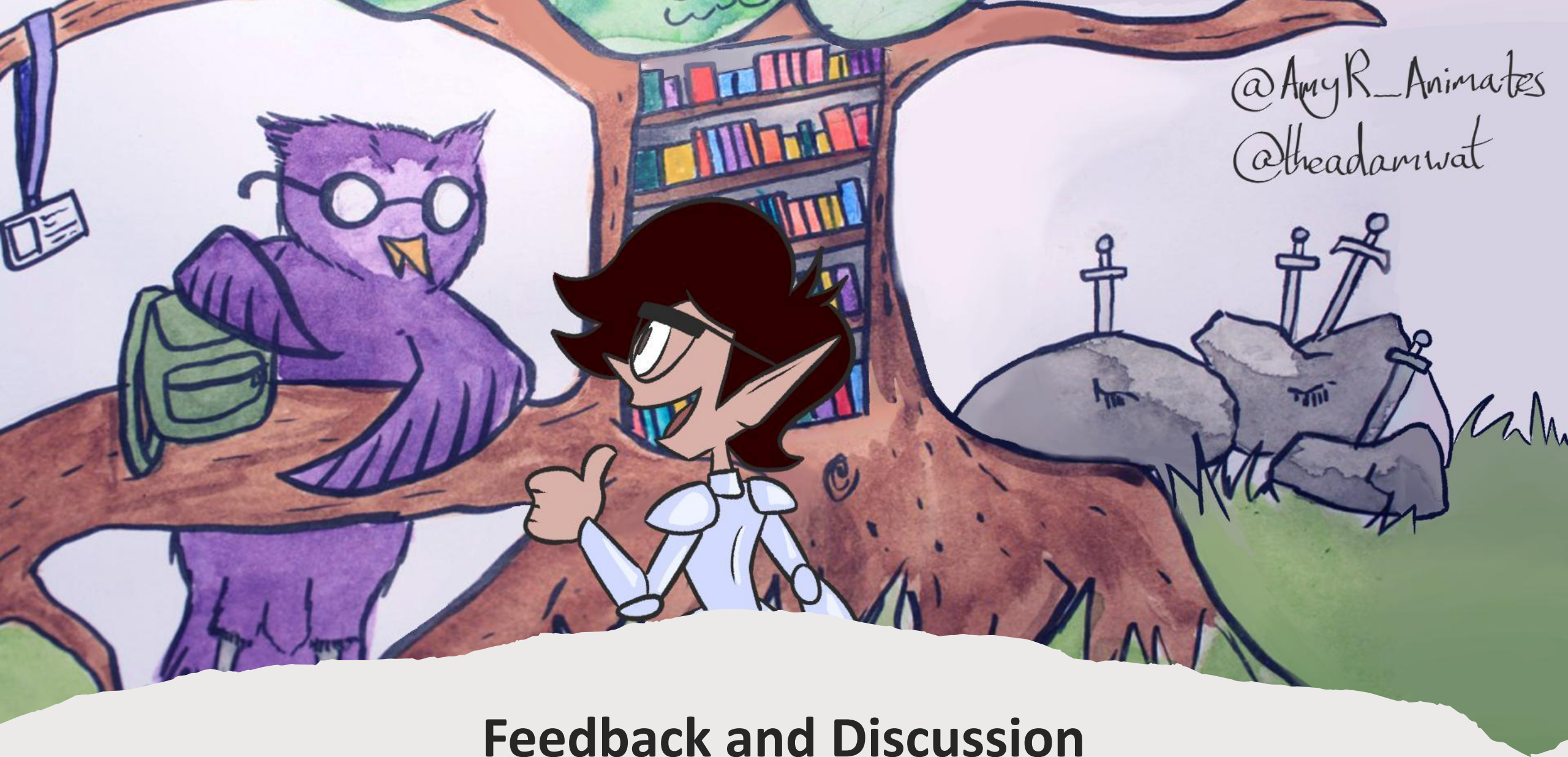
Feedback and Discussion

The Hero's Journey in Higher Education: A Twelve Stage Narrative Approach to the Design of Active, Student-Centred University Modules

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Abstract

This paper outlines and makes the case for a new, twelve stage narrative approach to the design of university modules. The twelve stages in the narrative approach to module design mirror the twelve stages which comprise the hero's journey in myth and legend, as discussed in the work of Campbell (1993) and Vogler (1985). The purpose of designing a university module to mirror the stages of the hero's journey is twofold. Firstly, it is proposed that the use of a narratively-focused design will lead to a greater sense of satisfaction on the part of those taking the module, because the narrative approach considers, for example, the importance of beginnings and endings, as well as the emotional journey of the participants. Secondly, the narrative approach is constructed to create module designs which are active and student-centred, thus a very strong emphasis is placed on what the students will be doing in each of the stages. Throughout the paper each of the twelve stages is explained, and an example of what the teacher and students might do in each of the stages is given. This narrative approach to module design has been constructed primarily for teachers who would like to design their modules to be more active and student centred, but who are unsure how to go about this and would like a supportive framework within which the module can be designed.

Keywords: Active Learning, Learning Design, Module Design, Hero's Journey, Mythic Structure, Monomyth

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THE HERO'S JOURNEY   CREDITS & FURTHER READING

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http://bit.ly/TheHerosJourneyInHE   https://mypad.northampton.ac.uk/hero/