

# The Hero's Journey in Higher Education

A Twelve Stage Narrative Approach to the Design  
of University Modules

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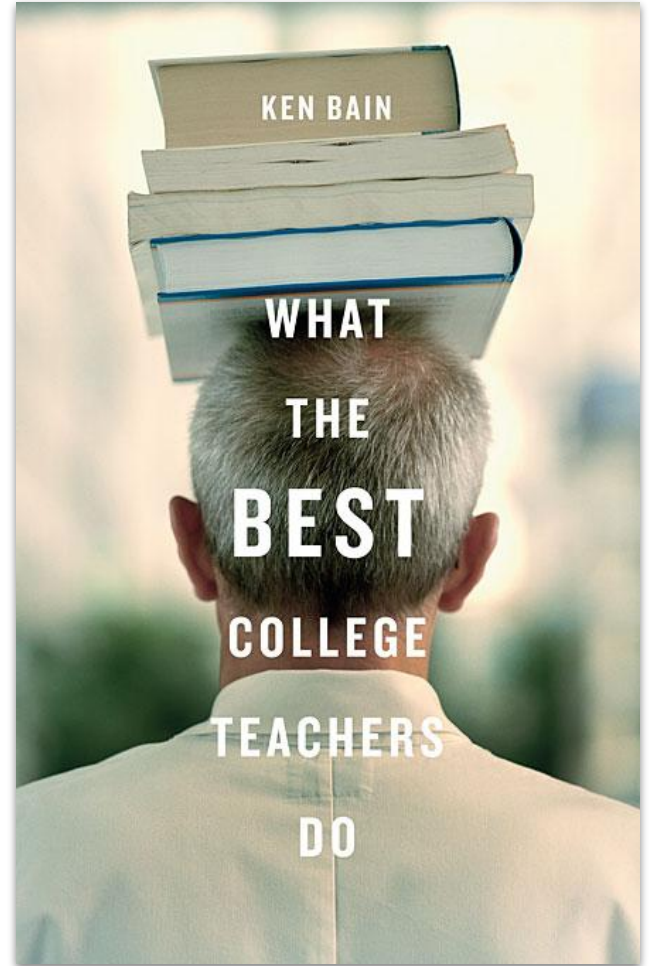


7th June, 2019



**“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*

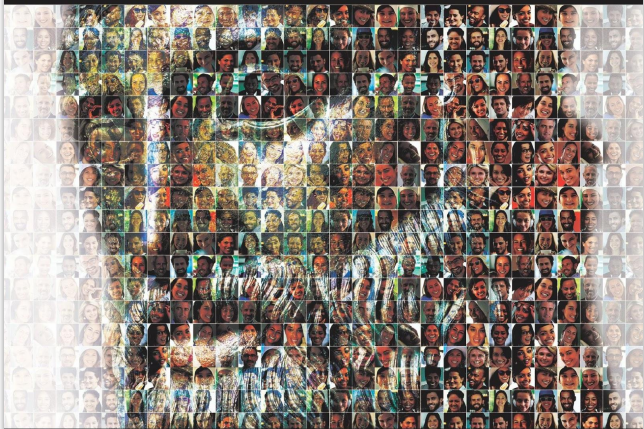




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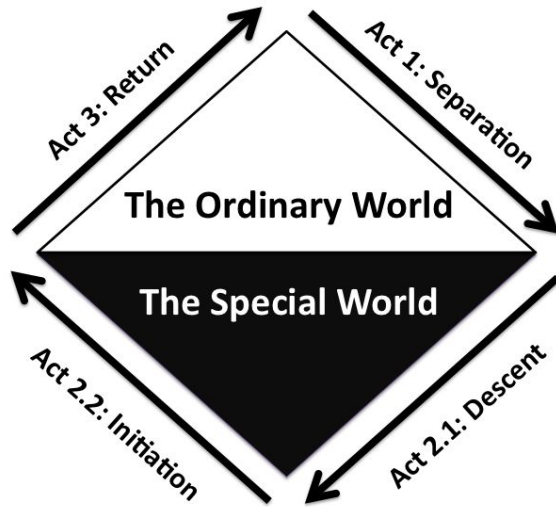
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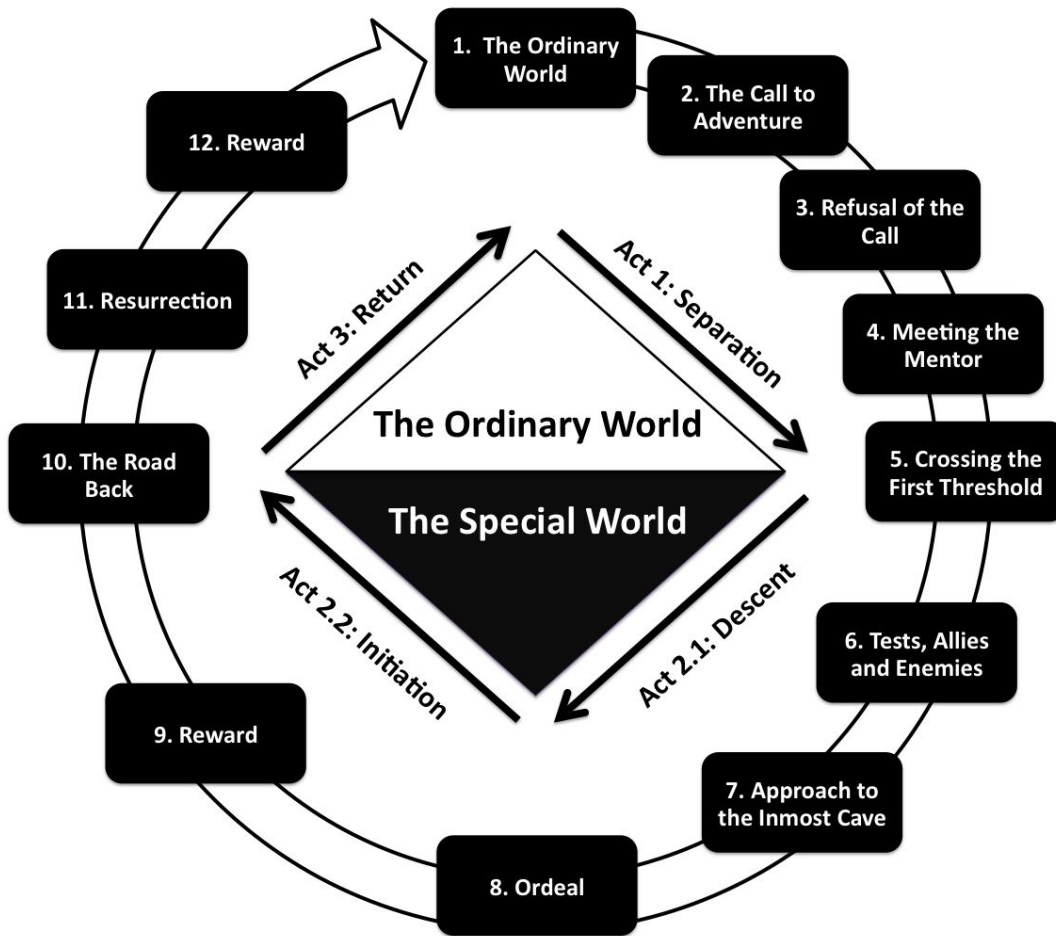




**The Ordinary World**

**The Special World**





## 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).

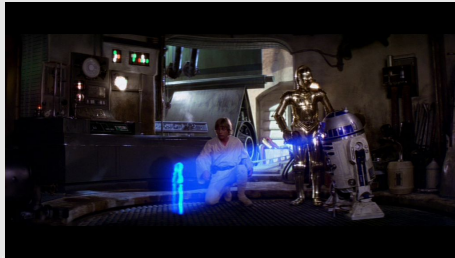
# STAR WARS







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**)



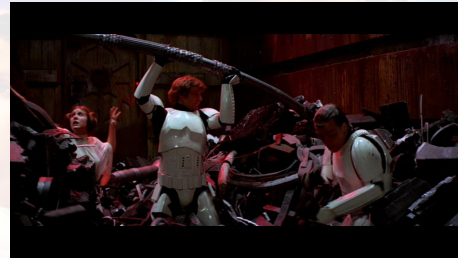
v) The hero passes the first threshold (**CROSSING THE THRESHOLD**)



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



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



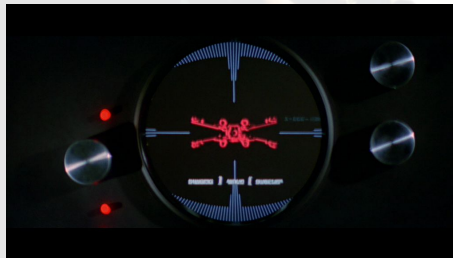
viii) The hero endures the supreme **ORDEAL**



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



x) **THE ROAD BACK**



xi) **RESURRECTION**

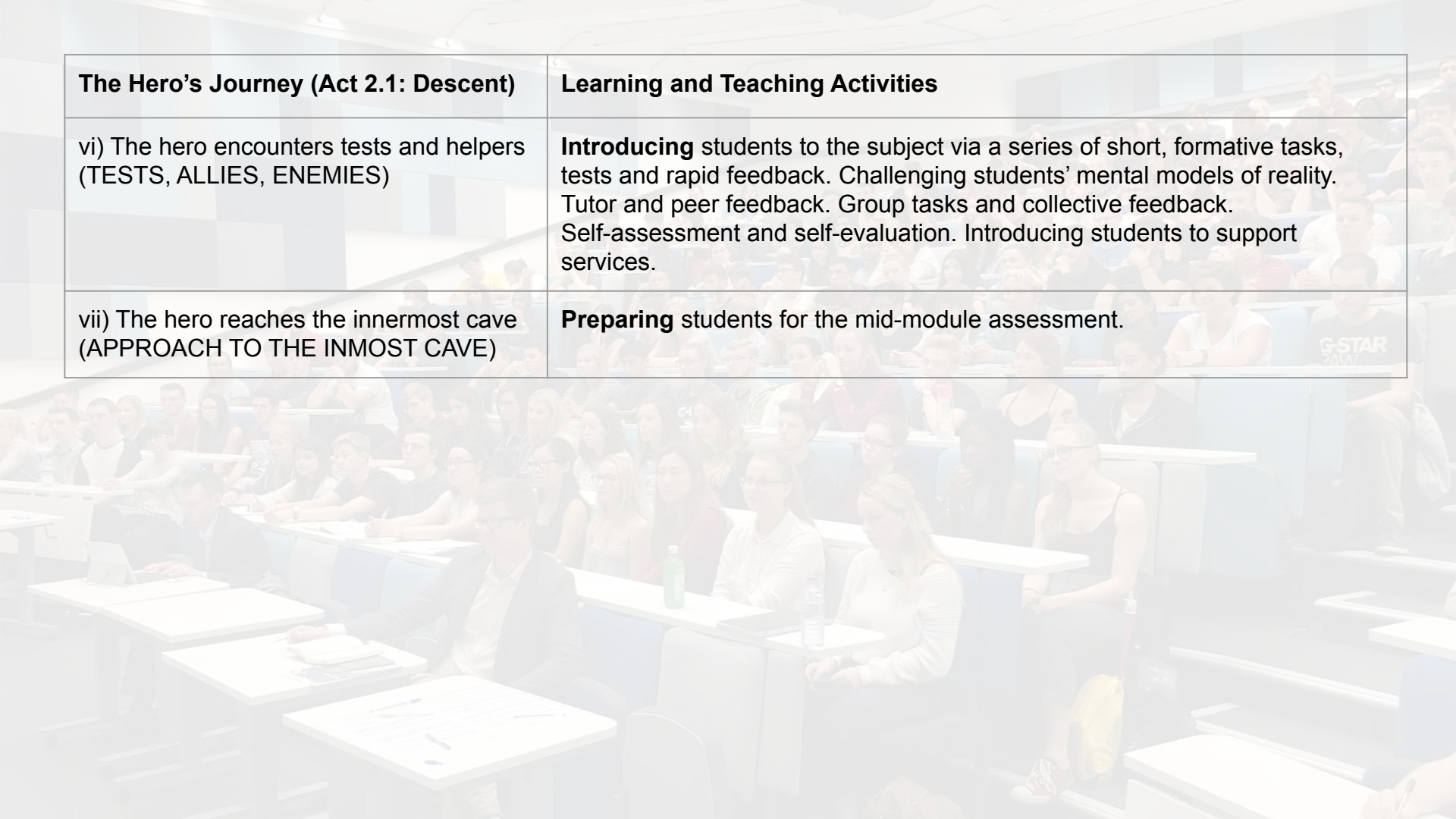


xii) **RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR**



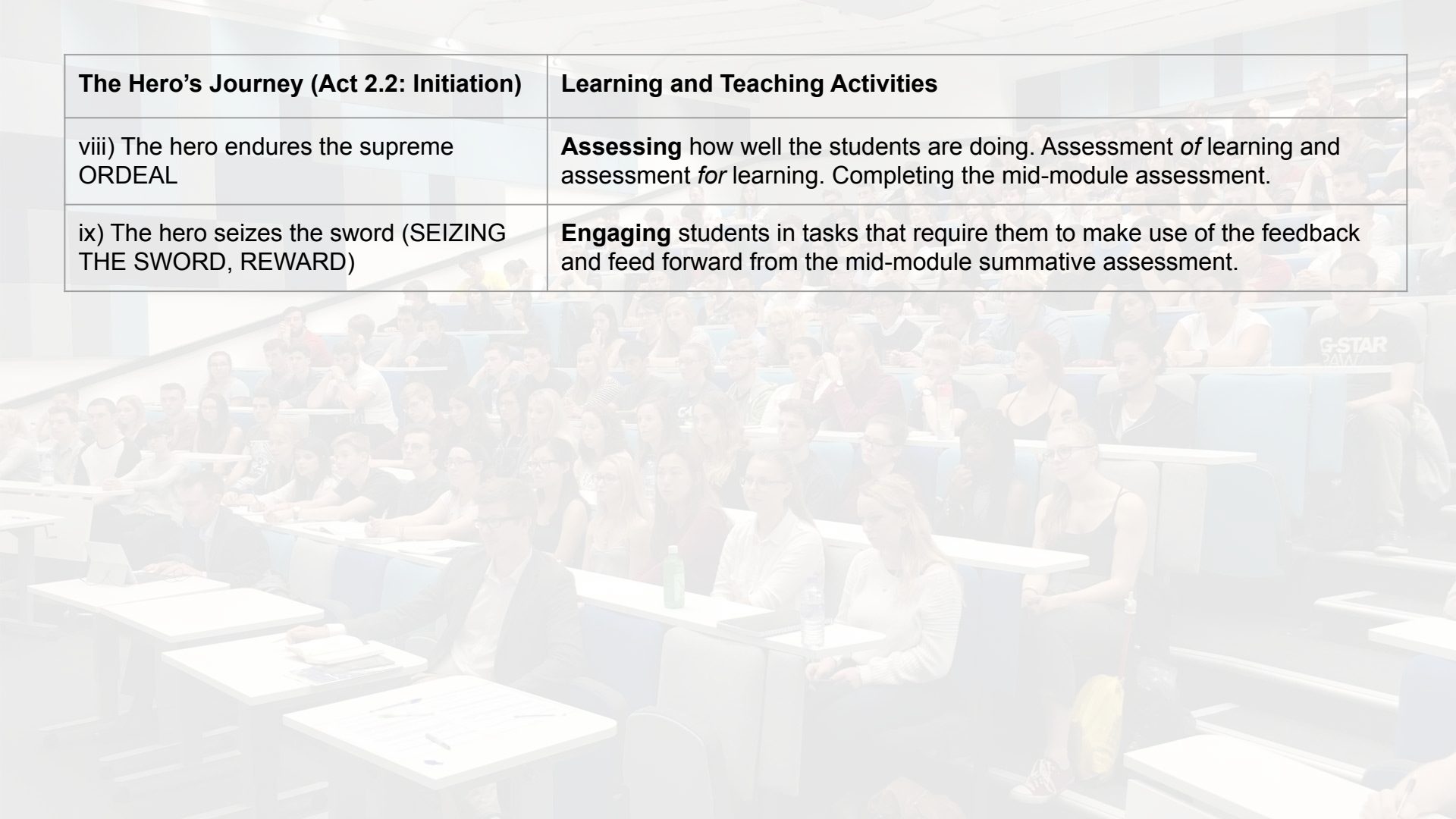


<b>The Hero's Journey (Act 1: Separation)</b>	<b>Learning and Teaching Activities</b>
i) The hero is introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD	<b>Establishing</b> the foundations upon which a community of learning can be built. Getting to know one another. Creating a safe and supportive learning environment.
ii) The CALL TO ADVENTURE	<b>Inviting</b> 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)	<b>Listening</b> 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)	<b>Motivating</b> , reassuring and encouraging students by responding to their fears and concerns.
v) The hero passes the first threshold (CROSSING THE THRESHOLD)	<b>Beginning</b> the teaching and learning.

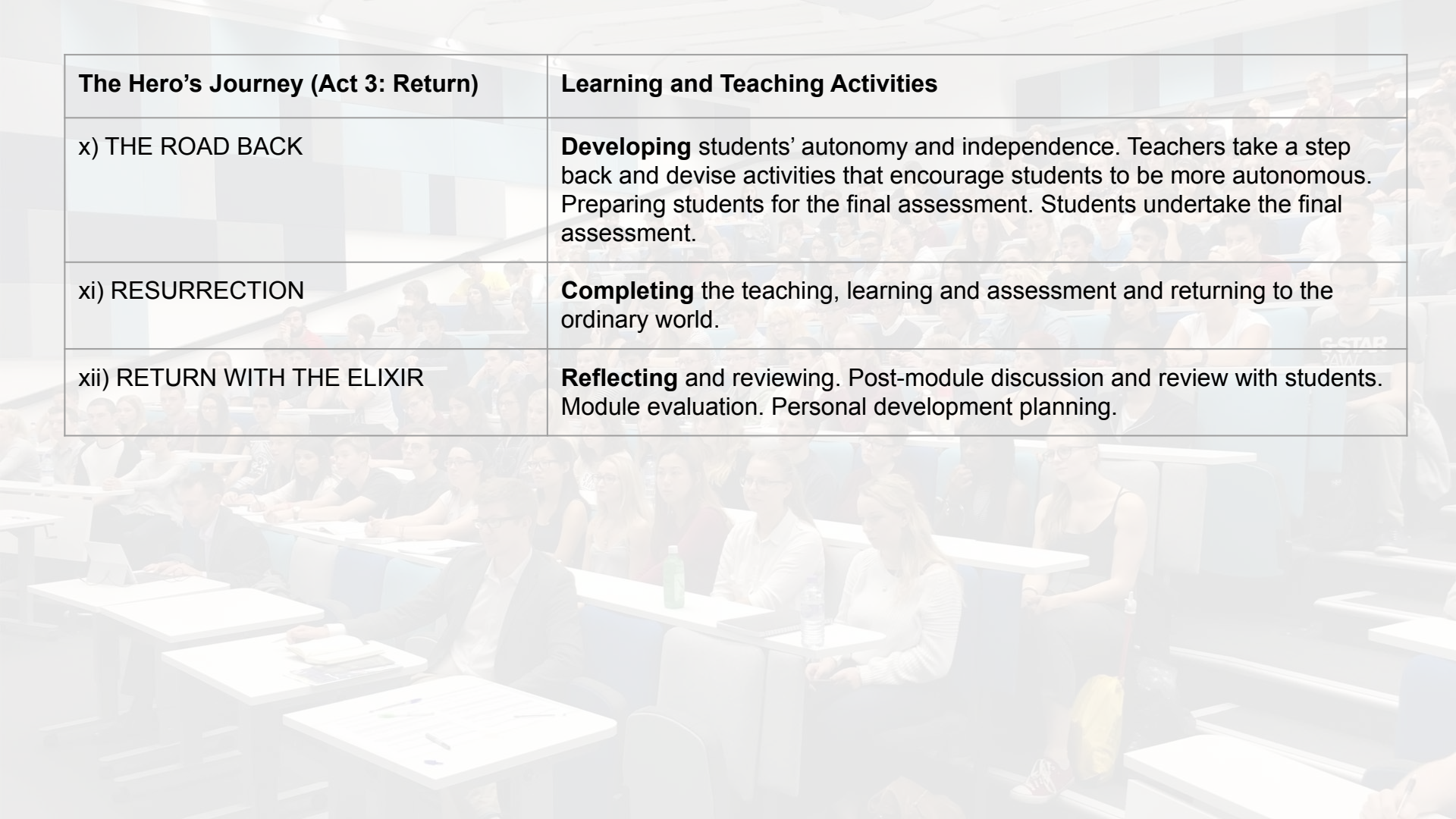


<b>The Hero's Journey (Act 2.1: Descent)</b>	<b>Learning and Teaching Activities</b>
vi) The hero encounters tests and helpers (TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES)	<b>Introducing</b> students to the subject via a series of short, formative tasks, tests and rapid feedback. Challenging students' mental models of reality. 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)	<b>Preparing</b> students for the mid-module assessment.





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



<b>The Hero's Journey (Act 3: Return)</b>	<b>Learning and Teaching Activities</b>
x) THE ROAD BACK	<b>Developing</b> 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	<b>Completing</b> the teaching, learning and assessment and returning to the ordinary world.
xii) RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR	<b>Reflecting</b> and reviewing. Post-module discussion and review with students. Module evaluation. Personal development planning.



## 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


<http://bit.ly/TheHerosJourneyInHE>



## References, acknowledgements, contact information

Doig, A. (2015) *The Hero's Journey through Online Learning*. Poster presented at the annual conference of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education, Southampton, March 30 – April 1.

Farmer, R. (2019) The Hero's Journey in Higher Education: A Twelve Stage Narrative Approach to the Design of University Modules. *Innovative Practice in Higher Education*, 3(3), pp.1-21. Available from:  
<http://journals.staffs.ac.uk/index.php/ipihe/article/view/181>

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