

Building Compassion Capacity: Chester Retold and Storyhouse, a Case Study

Eileen Pollard, University of Chester

ABSTRACT

This article is a case study of a level five experiential learning module that I designed and taught at the University of Chester in the summer term of 2018 in collaboration with the city's innovative new arts hub, Storyhouse. As a case study, it will demonstrate how 'compassion' can be placed at the heart of module design within Higher Education Arts and Humanities teaching, as well as how compassionate practice can emerge organically from innovation.

Keywords: Storying Sheffield, Chester Retold, Community, Experiential Learning, Alternative Teaching Spaces

Introduction

The module is called Chester Retold: Unspoken Stories, Put into Words and is seven weeks in length, each week involving a two-hour talk and a two-hour workshop on a different aspect of storytelling. For its initial delivery topics included: maps and mapping; memory; fabrics and clothing; storyboarding and graphics; drama and guided meditation. The core innovation was two-fold: classes were taught at the Parkgate Road campus and within the Storyhouse building, in new and unusual spaces such as the Garret Bar and Theatre and the Boardroom, overlooking the city itself. Moreover, members of the Chester community were also enrolled on the module alongside English literature and creative writing undergraduates.

Chester Retold was inspired by Professor Brendan Stone's prize-winning Storying Sheffield, which similarly enrolls Sheffield residents as 'short-course' students and records their stories of the city alongside those of the undergraduates. A key tenet of Storying Sheffield is widening access and participation, consequently a number of short-course students have previously experienced long-term unemployment and/or mental health problems and through Storying Sheffield have been helped back into education or work. Likewise on Chester Retold, the first short-course students were drawn from the North West charity Fallen Angels Dance Theatre, which supports people recovering from addiction and/or mental health problems through using movement and dance. These students applied to complete Chester Retold as a free-standing module and had their fees waived personally by our Vice-Chancellor. As well as these structural innovations, the module also utilised a number of creative engagement strategies, which included a walk around the city walls, all-the-senses exercises and a Situationist-inspired 'flashmob' in the Storyhouse foyer (Knabb, 2006). The students were assessed with an 'authentic' assignment in the form of a proposal and project on an aspect of storytelling of their choice: short-course students also had the option of completing the assessment, and one of them did so in the module's first iteration.

This case study will emphasise how the different teaching spaces, the edge-of-the-seat engagement strategies and the involvement of non-traditional students, all combined to grow and strengthen the experience of mindfulness and wellbeing on the module. As well as the contextual background to Chester Retold, I will examine the staff and student feedback (included as an appendix) alongside my own video diaries reflecting on the teaching process as it happened, to demonstrate how compassion emerged, both the giving and the receiving, as central to the learning experience for all.

The case study will conclude with a consideration of how the compassion model within this module can be utilised more widely across HE to build compassion-capacity into full degree programmes in the future.

Although primarily a case study, this article does include an indicative bibliography of the pedagogical material that has provided a basis for the different 'innovations' enacted on the module. It therefore draws upon work done on situated learning, constructivism, critical pedagogy, experiential learning and discovery learning, as detailed in the bibliography.

Setting and Background

As well as being inspired by Storying Sheffield, the building of a new theatre, cinema and library in the centre of Chester also informed the shape of the module. The city had been without a theatre and cinema for many years, and my Dean of Faculty at the time and my Head of Department were keen to capitalise on the new advantages for humanities students of the Storyhouse venture. As a result, the module was designed from the outset as a joint project between the English Department and the Storyhouse team.

In its first run the main connection with Storyhouse was achieved through working with the University Storyhouse Cultural Education Lead to make contact with Fallen Angels Dance Theatre and investigate if this organisation was interested in being involved with the module as a community partner. The other side of the collaboration was our use of the Storyhouse building for some of the teaching sessions. Storyhouse is a renovated 1930s art deco cinema and the building is full of interesting hybrid spaces combining old and new. Due to the pressure on space in Storyhouse (and the need to maximise on it financially, especially in the building's first year of opening) I designed the module so that the talks would take place on the Parkgate Road campus, while the workshops were timetabled to be in the Storyhouse Garret Bar and Theatre space, with one class scheduled in the Boardroom.

Our arrangement meant that the community students were able to experience the university environment: beginning in the first week with a tour of the campus that included the library, the students union and the chapel, built by previous students when the university was a college. As I commented in my video diary at the time, this aspect of the module 'demystified' both the university lecture/seminar room and the campus itself, which despite the fact that two of the community students were from the city, they had never set foot on it before. The workshops were very hands-on and experiential, as you will see from the 'Edge-of-the-Seat Activities' section below, which meant that the open spaces of the Garret Bar and Theatre were perfect for these more 'performative' exercises. For all these workshops in the Garret, we moved easily as a class between the two spaces, often starting in the bar with a circle of chairs (much like a seminar) and then moving into the theatre for guided meditations, drama exercises and readings. In the Bar, and then later in the Boardroom, we enjoyed spectacular views of the city and the surrounding countryside of Cheshire and North Wales, which on a module that was designed to record Chester's stories was both inspiring and appropriate.

Experiencing and learning in these different and new spaces had a surprisingly positive effect on the students, both long-course and short-course. They were more accepting of the fact that the space could not be tightly controlled, for example, members of the public wandered into the Garret Bar on several occasions: intrusions that did not matter. There was a relinquishing of control by both them and me that was accompanied by a unifying feeling of 'all being in the same boat' – an explicit response in the feedback session. The new space was also novel and exciting and it is important not to underestimate the importance of novelty. It sounds superficial perhaps, but learning is emotional and as teachers we should be aware of emotional range and the impact of trying to create an emotional dimension to our teaching.

It is worth bearing in mind that we are all, to a greater or lesser extent, inspired by experiences that are 'new'. It is important to reflect and be critical, but this does not mean it is not also important to evolve and change. The students were more relaxed in a space that they perceived as 'less formal'. For example, in the Garret Bar we sat in armchairs with cushions and surrounded by coffee tables or stools: the casual furniture did not make learning difficult, instead it seemed to open up the possibility of different ways of learning, more intuitive and emotional ones. The students shared their personal stories on the module, which was a sharing that emerged from a feeling of safety that grew from a complex matrix of factors – small group, good tutors, supportive atmosphere – but was further informed by place: we were in a place where people have personal conversations. The Socratic dialogue as a method does not mean the dialogue needs to be about Socrates (Saran and Neisser, 2004). There is much evidence that place can actually change physiological processes in the body, which in turn alters the way people feel. If, as teachers, we can change the way students feel – lethargic, bored, overwhelmed – we can engage them in learning, improve their mental wellbeing and teach more compassionately: as has been observed, though we focus on cognition there are other aspects to learning, they are not, after all, brains on sticks.

The students on this module shared stories, as stated, but I felt, observing them, that they all without exception also became better listeners. Compassion for the self is harder than compassion for others, and yet listening and being heard strengthens people's ability for both outward and inward compassion. The walk around the city walls had a similar effect. I was not sure it would make a 'difference' when we set off. A departmental PhD student and Visiting Lecturer had been delivering the talk, which was about the stories generated by and through digital mapping, then she explained we would put into practice our learning – especially concerning mindfulness and sensation – by going for a walk. Even I (the module's leader and most vocal proponent) was not sure that this would really work, i.e. make us learn through feeling, but what I am now sure of is that we were all closer as a group, more trusting of each other, and collectively in a better headspace when we returned to the classroom than when we set off. We simply would not have got there if we had stayed in the classroom 'learning' for the equivalent amount of time. We need to consider the relationship between contact and content, and perhaps what we mean by 'content', after all to paraphrase W. B. Yeats, we are not 'filling a pail'.

Community Dimension

In preparation for the module, I had to make sure that a number of safeguards were in place to protect both those joining us from the community, who were recovering from addiction and/or

mental health problems, as well as the undergraduates. Such preparation involved making sure that my DBS check was up-to-date and on file, that I was able to team-teach with another Visiting Lecturer colleague to ensure that tutor attention was evenly distributed throughout the class,¹ and finally, by completing a faculty-level ethics check to record and photograph sessions on the module. What was interesting about the ethics check process was that the emphasis was on how I would 'protect' the undergraduates from the potential disclosures of the community students. The process prompted me, rightly, to reflect on how I would do so, and meant I introduced 'frames' to classes that might involve such disclosures, as well as building in reference to appropriate external resources. However, this reflection also made me wonder, in a world that is so full of 'violence', whether protecting, or perhaps even sheltering, our undergraduates from the realities of addiction, mental illness and homelessness, is ultimately serving them? Most, if not all, undergraduates are aware of these social problems, and increasing numbers are directly affected by them, especially mental health problems.

My early sense that the emphasis of the ethics check might be in the wrong place was to an extent confirmed during the running of the module. Firstly, the importance of maintaining good mental health and wellbeing emerged as a strong strand within Chester Retold, which was not an aspect of the course I felt I had explicitly 'put' there. This emergence was no doubt in part due to disclosures from tutors, community students and undergraduates concerning both mental health problems and, much more importantly, mental health strategies – ways to relax, ways to calm the inner critic, to enter the senses, to be in the moment. As will be illustrated in the activities section below, as a class we did not just talk about these strategies either, we enacted them. Part of how such 'enacting' was achieved was through the community dimension because, in wishing to work with Fallen Angels, I had been advised by one of the co-founders that having someone within the class who the Angels had already worked with, and trusted, would be a helpful and potentially necessary addition to the module. It was this advice that led me to inviting a local writing and wellbeing practitioner, onto Chester Retold. Her role was two-fold, she was a community student, but she also ran reflective writing exercises at the end of each workshop to bring together the threads of that week's activities. As these exercises were reflective, they were also mindful and the students found them at times very revealing, in terms of what specifically they were struggling with (rather than the anxiety remaining nebulous and overwhelming) and, on other occasions, they found her exercises both calming and relaxing. Before colleagues consider introducing such exercises, it is worth noting that the key ingredient here is trust, which my video diaries illustrate was a central investment throughout the module. For example, an early exercise involved the students working in pairs in the Storyhouse space, one person with their eyes closed, the other leading, allowing them both to experience the Garret Bar and Theatre differently, and establish trust and rapport. Such exercises were particularly important in the initial classes because there were two groups of students (long-course and short-course) and I wanted to ensure that almost immediately there was only one: namely, the students. I continued with similar exercises throughout, mainly in the workshops, including the rich-tea-biscuit-conversations (please see below) and the reawakening-your-senses flashmob towards the end of the module, but I feel that they are crucial to build in at the outset of a module of this type.

¹ This Visiting Lecturer went on to win a University of Chester excellence in teaching award, partly on the basis of her work on Chester Retold.

Ultimately though, there was more than one direct correlation between the compassionate practice emerging on the module and the community's involvement. What was significant was that instead of the undergraduates 'shying away' from the disclosures of the community students, it had the opposite effect: it made them more able to disclose difficulties they had experienced themselves. It is easy to consider undergraduates only in terms of their vulnerabilities, as a group predominately made up of 18-21 year olds, and all of them in power relations with staff, the university and wider society that generally leave them at a disadvantage. However, they are adults and many of them have experienced much that adult life can throw at a person: when I was training as an HE teacher, the way this was summarised was 'always remember, you never know who you have in the room'. I discovered in teaching Chester Retold that despite the fact that I am an adult over 21, like the community students on the module, my undergraduates are less likely to disclose or discuss openly their experiences or difficulties with me (other than at a point of extreme crisis) because I am at a remove. I am not a peer, not perceived as having-lived-life or as being open to discussing it. Ultimately, despite perhaps being perceived as caring, most academics are not perceived as 'compassionate' by students.

One undergraduate had it right when they discussed their experience of the module with me in a tutorial. They felt able to talk to the community students on the module about the harsh difficulties of their life because, not only did they not feel judged by them, but they knew intuitively from their own disclosures that they would understand. Overall, I think that she felt the community students were more on her wavelength, certainly more so than academics, and perhaps more so than the student body. If modules work to bring the voices of more marginalised people into university spaces that is of course good for those communities, but it is also good for those undergraduates already within the university space who themselves belong to those marginalised groups. There is an element of self-recognition, 'I can talk to this person more easily because we come from the same place, class, race etc'. Thus, the ethics check meant I had been 'looking through the wrong end of the telescope' as I commented in my video diary following this tutorial. There was not, after all, such a great need to 'protect' my undergraduates from an aspect of the module that was actually more enabling and supportive of them than I could have been without it.

Again, such compassion cut both ways though. The students felt listened to in a very different way, they felt heard, but at the same time they themselves listened and reflected. As stated above, this dynamic strengthened the skills required for both inward and outward compassion. By developing more compassion for others, and the serious and real situations of those others, the undergraduates were able to gain perspective and consider strategies of resilience. The relationship was therefore symbiotic: the undergraduates gave back to the community students as well as learning from them, note the comment from a short-course student in the appendix about 'interacting with fabulous young brains and hearts'.

Edge-of-the-Seat Activities

I have written elsewhere of the benefits of what I have termed 'live' pedagogy (Pollard, 2014, 2015), but, in brief, it concerns emphasising (perhaps even exploiting) the potential and the possibilities of the live-ness of teaching. That we, the teachers and the students, are all embodied, living and breathing, in the same space at the same time is a 'tool' available to us. Much as with other projects I have spearheaded, utilising the qualities of such live-ness was central to Chester Retold, and, I

would argue, core also to the compassionate teaching that emerged from the module. To engage is to be compassionate. To involve all the senses is to be inclusive, and therefore compassionate. To keep everyone on the edge-of-their-seat is to unify, which is an act of compassion, to bring everyone together. There were a number of such activities on the module, for example: the campus tour; the walk around the city walls; the guided meditation; the storyboarding; the sharing of fabrics brought in by students; the memory line (of which more in a moment); using lavender, rosemary and orange blossom to stimulate memory; rich-tea-biscuit-conversations; dramatizing scenes and stories; staging a flashmob; performance of poems and flashes. Furthermore, following the success of the ethics check, I was able to extensively photograph and record activities on the module, so I produced a Photobox book of selected pictures, telling the 'story of the module' in images, and I also made a video compilation of edited highlights of the recordings.

In terms of the learning benefits of these exercises, the walk around the city walls actively involved the senses, but also a socio-political engagement with the realities of the city, for example, homelessness. The guided meditation took place in the Garret Theatre and our facilitator, a colleague from the Faculty of Education, called it a Mind Derive. She explained the origin of this exercise was to help with behavioural problems in the classroom by calming pupils through using their imagination. The discussions afterwards demonstrated that we had all visualised the same 'walk through the city' differently, and we considered what this revealed about ourselves. The students then brought in both fabrics and belongings during the 'object' sessions, and read a piece of my own creative writing, 'Meditation on a Bus Seat', inspired by an ordinary object. During the storyboarding sessions, for the first time in my experience of teaching English literature, my students drew pictures to make them think about storytelling techniques.

The memory line I created for my sessions on memory was partially based on an activity that I had heard the poet Lemn Sissay explain on Desert Island Discs. As a care leaver himself, he has worked extensively with young people leaving care and one exercise he described resonated at the time and stayed with me afterwards. He asked each young person to write on a sheet of paper an experience of their being in care. Then he strung up a makeshift washing line in a room with the blinds drawn and the lights off, so that the room was in total darkness. He pegged each sheet of paper to the line and then sent each young person into the room, one at a time, with a torch to read each of the sheets of paper in turn. Sissay felt that this was the closest he could come to enacting the experience of being a care leaver: alone, in the dark, with only a torch and these stories. For me, teaching is something in between a piece of art and an act of politics, which was my feeling about Sissay's exercise and why I wanted to reshape it for my sessions on memory. My students encountered a number of memory triggers on the memory line, and engaged with the line in pairs while the remaining students were involved in a different exercise outside the room (in the corridor, another alternative teaching space) that focused on scent as a route to memory. As demonstrated by the photograph (figure three) and like a number of the more daring exercises on the module, this task forged an overlapping of art and politics. It merged immersive, performative and conceptual forms of art with ideas around installation, but it was also political as it preceded and therefore framed a session exploring the exponential rise in people suffering from dementia and the challenges of an aging population.

As with the memory line, the subsequent rich-tea-biscuit-conversations were also inspired by someone else, in this case Professor Simon Piasecki of Liverpool Hope University, who I heard speak at an HEA conference in 2016. This exercise highlights the difficulties of communication by literally putting an 'obstacle' in the student's mouth and asking them to explain a memory. The obstacle is half a rich tea biscuit. It is extremely difficult to take yourself seriously with half a biscuit in your mouth, which means that the exercise also creates a bond of trust between people: it is levelling and it brings them together through this shared experience of silliness and vulnerability. Compassion is an emotion that flourishes in such moments of frivolity, informality, and indeed, absurdity. Again, participants have to listen much more attentively because of the obstacle in their interlocutor's mouth.

Finally, the drama exercises took place in the Garret Theatre and were facilitated by a recent graduate of the English Department, which added 'value' to the experience for the undergraduates, as she offered them a role model. Prior to this class, the staging of a flashmob in the foyer entrance of the Storyhouse building was the module's piece de resistance! It was designed to enact the Situationist philosophy of the need to defamiliarise, disrupt, interrupt, everyday experience under Capitalism. We made ourselves the 'spectacle' by dancing together to Johnny B. Goode and involving members of the general public. The fact that the music was not loud enough and a number of the students did not dance, but instead chose to film those who did dance, only added to the sense of 'event'.

Conclusion

Lessons Learned

In terms of key lessons learned that I personally would emphasise in the practical implementation of any module like Chester Retold, taking learning out-of-the-classroom, embedding mental health strategies that involve the senses and including members of marginalized groups from the local community, are the most important. Another lesson though was that the compassionate or emotional learning that took place on the module was not listed in the learning outcomes for the module in the first iteration, as it emerged in the 'doing' rather than the 'planning' of the module. In the summer of 2018, the learning outcomes were: apply a variety of storytelling skills and methods to the completion of students own independent personal projects; show ability to source a range of appropriate storytelling material and use their analytical and rhetorical skills to interpret this material; reveal practical understanding of the different skills involved in devising, approaching and organising the effective telling of stories; present effectively students own personal projects, with all the necessary bibliographical, referencing and annotational accuracy. The assessment took the form of a personal project examining an aspect of storytelling of the student's choice, and in a manner of their choosing as well. For example, the work could be a critical, or academic, analysis of a type of story, such as fairy tale, or a sample of the student's own creative writing, or a reflective piece exploring what that student had learned on the module. The flexibility and versatility of the assessment – several students produced projects with critical, creative and reflective elements – meant that both the 'unexpected learning' and the emotional intelligence gained on the module were actually captured and assessed. The reflective work in particular ranged from analysis of specific interactions between students on the module to detailed examination of an aspect of a student's past and the 'stories' they and others had told about it. The change needed in future is a revision of the module learning outcomes to include compassionate and emotional learning as part

of what is happening on the module and also therefore part of what is being assessed in the personal project.

I will conclude with a summary of the aspects of the module that contributed to the emergence of compassion on Chester Retold – emerging both through the pedagogy, the way the sessions were taught, as well as between the students themselves, the way they were encouraged to engage and how they did so of their own accord: Storyhouse as a space and its potential – in terms of other courses, consider the arts hub within your own city or town and whether or not you could teach there; the background to the module, for example, I shared Professor Brendan Stone’s practice with the students early on in Chester Retold, and I think that this ‘example’ helped me to achieve ‘buy in’; the community dimension and realising that that which we protect our students from they may actually need; innovative and daring exercises, students are not simply brains on sticks – the more we ‘embody’ learning and remember that students have bodies that require breaks and changes, the better the learning will be. Ultimately, my key message is this: anywhere can be a classroom.

This article has been a case study: I have described in detail what I have done, partly to share my practice, but also to reflect upon it, an important aspect of Chester Retold at the time. I recorded myself in a video diary following each session, reflecting at-the-point-of-delivery what had gone well, as well as what I could improve, and I also compiled feedback from colleagues, short-course and long-course students (please see appendix). I did these feedback exercises in two ways: on paper anonymously, and also in-class so that we could have a proper discussion. This discussion aided the quality of my reflection and that of the students because they did not always agree and it was challenging because the undergraduates heard different feedback from the community students. As a sector we need to effectively model to students how to give constructive feedback, especially as so much of our teaching is ‘measured’ through such feedback. I modelled to the students two ways of giving feedback, anonymously on paper and then through open discussion, to begin to illustrate how and why different methods are important and give a more rounded view. From informal feedback in tutorials, I already knew that the students had benefitted from the module, so when I initiated the open discussion I structured it by posing a question: ‘If Chester Retold, as module, was under threat of being withdrawn from provision, what would you say to explain and justify its value?’ I wanted to demonstrate to the students how much impact their feedback can and does have on provision. The involvement of the community students also meant that the feedback was more outward facing, shifting the focus away from ‘the individual’, which is the focus for so much feedback now, both inside and outside HE. As an example, please see the comment below in the appendix – ‘The community aspect needs developing’ – with the original emphasis included.

However, this article also wishes to briefly address the building of capacity. In a sense this has already started, from Storying Sheffield we already have Chester Retold; however, for every Arts and Humanities faculty, in the future we could have such a module. Moreover, outside of the arts, the practices of using alternative spaces, involving the community and remembering that students are not brains-on-sticks can be utilised by any subject or discipline: it would only be a question of those specialists and teachers deciding on the specifics of where, who and how. It is through broad implementation of such methods – aside from the focus on story, which can potentially bring in a

number of subjects – that we will bring compassion into programmes, and once it is in programmes, even if it is just one module, the process of building capacity has begun.

Biography

Eileen Pollard is a Senior Lecturer in English literature at the University of Chester. She has previously published on 'live' pedagogy in *Learning and Teaching in Action*, *Journal of Academic Development and Education* and *Times Higher Education*. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

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Figures

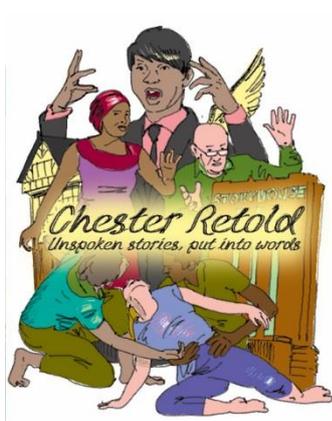


Figure One Module IDENT commissioned by Department of English, University of Chester, funded by Storyhouse, conceptualised and drawn by Dr Simon Grennan



Figure Two Photograph of undergraduates and community students in the mirrors above the Storyhouse entrance (used with permission)



Figure Three Photograph of memory line and memory triggers

Appendix

I have included below an edited selection of written feedback received on the first iteration of Chester Retold, May-June 2018. The comments are colour-coded as follows: red for colleagues, green for short-course students, blue for long-course students.

Try to explain 'Chester Retold' in your own words. What has it meant to you?

I think this will have been really beneficial to the students partaking in the module, as they would have got a taste of all sorts of different modes of story telling and different experiences.

It has been an opportunity to wind down and study multiple different areas of interest that I otherwise wouldn't have explored. I've met people who have inspired me and made me much more determined towards work/assignments. The module made learning enjoyable.

I've learnt that my personal stories are valid and important. I've found my experiences different to other people's, but most importantly I've learnt that that's okay.

Exchange of ideas. Experimenting. Stimulation. Interacting with fabulous young brains and hearts. Flexibility. Warmth. Reflection.

The whole experience was quite 'eye opening'.

It meant looking at the city again from a different perspective – re-evaluating what you previously thought about Chester and seeing it through fresh eyes.

Chester retold offers an unusual pathway, because it actively seeks students with a range of personal, professional and educational backgrounds, interrogates and overcomes disciplinary boundaries and utilises a wide range of pedagogic methods and expertise. It is able to do this by exploiting the range of ideas that fall under 'story telling' to bring people, media, methods and concepts together.

It was great to have my former student involved.

What have you enjoyed about the module? And why?

The space at Storyhouse is also such a brilliant asset to the module.

Our senses were constantly bombarded with new experiences, new knowledge.

I enjoyed the freedom of the sessions and how comfortable the other students made the sessions feel. The module gave me an opportunity to reflect on memories and powerful moments and incorporated a lot of areas that helped mentally.

The creativity and mixture of people. The creative side is usually forgotten about on the rest of the course and it helps that there are people with different thoughts and backgrounds other than your own.

I enjoyed the interactivity because it's a different way to learn such as mapping out Chester by walking through it.

All of the hands on activities because it was a change from just sitting in a lecture hall.

I have most enjoyed working with students with a wide range of life experiences.

What will you take away from the experience?

The idea that not every learning experience has to be strictly regimented and that learning can happen in all sorts of different ways.

A renewed sense of the enjoyment and fulfilment of learning. I simply wish to learn more on the back of this module.

Mindfulness and its importance, but also the experience. It's been an incredible 7 weeks and I have learnt so much.

Well I'll never forget the experience! I've learnt that I can take my experiences – even negatives – and do something expressive and beautiful and positive with them.

I will take away the many different ways of expressing myself and not be as shy with different forms.

That teaching does not have to be static... actually, I should allow myself to employ more creative ways of learning in seminars!

Chester Retold provides a substantiated model for cross-disciplinary pedagogy.

What was the best thing about the module overall?

Making great connections with people, over a short amount of time.

How it enabled everyone to connect both inside and outside the module.

Feeling comfortable to share memories and personal thoughts and feeling and reflecting on them made me realise how happy I am and everything I have achieved this year.

What would you like to see developed further on the module in future?

Possibly a group activity to produce a piece of finished work – we started on this route in the 'derive' initiatives and acting a short play.

Potentially an exhibit of the creative works that are created by the students and possible work with nearby schools.

The community aspect needs developing.

Longer sessions or more of them.

Its continuation; more funding to allow disadvantaged people to take the course.

Would you recommend the module? If yes, who to and why?

Yes. It has been a combination of many things, but has been particularly insightful and interesting. Incorporating the workshops helped to engage my focus in the work and it has been the most enjoyable module at university so far. An amazing end to a stressful year.

Yes. This module is a breath of fresh air in terms of assessment. The pressure is still there, but it is a different type; one that doesn't feel overbearing. Fun, interesting and new.

Yes - I'd recommend teaching on the module to my colleagues. It allows for innovation in teaching and is an enriching experience in terms of professional development.