Example B

Context
I trialed reading resilience strategies with an advanced-level undergraduate 21st-century literary fiction course of 65 students.

Teaching and learning benefits

• Lectures and tutorials were exciting places to be because students had read the text! In 12 years of teaching, I had never before lectured to a class in which, every week, almost every student was ready and able to respond to or ask questions.
• Because students were so well prepared, tutorials developed into communities of practice. I gave up, at first a little nervously and then delightedly, the role of the ‘One Who Knows’ for a much richer learning and teaching experience.
• The arts undergraduate program can be fragmented and alienating, but students reported that working with engaged rather than resistant colleagues led to friendships that extended beyond the course itself.
• The formative nature of the assessment meant that students could work at and hone reading and writing skills in the course of the semester and put them into practice in a final research essay.
• Students developed oral skills of discussion and argumentation that will serve them well in other areas of study, as well as in their lives after they leave the university.

Challenges

• Student resistance to reading exercises:
  • While some students took to regular reading exercises like ducks to water, others were resistant. Initially some lacked the confidence to read and/or interpret complex texts without the lecturer’s imprimatur. The first two exercises need to be supported with tutorial practice.
  • Others enrolled with no intention of reading all the texts and freely admitted that they were used to limiting their course reading to those texts on which they would be assessed.
  • Distinguishing an exercise from an essay: The reading tasks/journal entries are as different from the standard research essay as a piece of flash fiction is from a Victorian novel. Because this wasn’t immediately apparent to my students, in the first weeks we returned from time to time to the marking rubric and the specific techniques and skills they were practising.

What I would do differently

For two reasons, I would reduce the number of texts from eight to six.

• Students chose six texts from eight on which to write. Despite the pleasure they reported experiencing from being in a tutorial for which everyone was prepared, some students did not read the texts on which they were not assessed.
• Some students found the reading load of eight novels, of which several were substantial, difficult to manage.