

Teaching, supervising, and learning

Some didactical issues in university teaching with special regard to History and African Studies

Or something about what kind of expectations university students could possibly have to their lecturer

! Undergoing work, not finished



General developments affecting teaching

- The use/relevance crisis of professional History
- Growing curricular diversity of approaches
- Post-modernism's demoralising effects
- Research, not teaching, being most important for academic merits
- Managerialism and accounting mentality
- Mainstreaming of lean-like leadership philosophies
- Administrative quality control of measurable learning outcomes



More developments affecting teaching

- Shifting departmental and institutional cultures, and disciplinary norms
- Students' non-university engagements
- Disintegration of internal university democracy
- Students' backgrounds becoming more diverse
- More non-major history students
- Students' identification with market demands



On the discipline of history I

- Understanding as mental representation of events and societies in the past
- Helps to understand current issues by relationship of the past to the present
- Due to its constructed nature historical knowledge is provisional
- The practice of history is therefore inherently creative, critical, reflective
- Imaginative engagement is essential



On the discipline of history II

- The ability to explain the causes, character, consequences, and significance of structures and processes in the past
- Establishing insight into subject, selves, and surrounding world
- Deep grasp of situations and societies that reaches beneath the surface of events to reveal underlying patterns
- Capability to act purposefully in a changing global order



A historian should be able to

- Articulate problems in need of resolution and formulate theses based upon what is already discovered
- Evaluate different sources, analyse various data, synthesise ideas
- Combine the duality of micro and macro elements into an overall picture
- Show the general in the particular, see the big in the small



Learning history for understanding

- Understanding is an integrative, holistic process
- Progression in understanding...
- i. Multi-structural: listing the views
- ii. Relational: comparing interpretations
- iii. Abstract: seeing the topic as a whole and from various perspectives



The good learning environment

- Supportive...
- Yet intellectually challenging
- Conducive to self-expression...
- Yet concentrating on substance and knowledge



Learning from the student perspective I

- Obtaining skills
- Acquiring employability
- Deriving pleasure from intellectual stimulation
- Developing critical thinking
- Getting new ideas
- Sharpening skills of argument, construction, and presentation



Learning from the student perspective II

- Expect teacher-understanding of the diversity in the classroom - who are the students
- See the teacher as facilitator and co-learner rather than authority-expert
- Learning is like having sex...
- You should not focus on the result, but rather concentrate on the process



Approaches to teaching history

- Subject knowledge
- Passion for the profession
- Qualified, self-reflective enquiry
- Values and style revealed
- Verbal/visual
- Logical/imaginative
- Impersonal/personal



Teaching from a traditional approach

- The storyteller or the scientific historian
- Focuses on events, things, individuals
- Content, narrative sweep, flow of history
- Driven by personal curiosity
- Sense of own roots
- One-way transmission model
- General education outcome
- Craft to be mastered



Teaching from a critical approach

- The reformer or the relativist
- Uses the past to create a better future
- Issues of social justice or problem-solving
- Cross-culturalism against provincialism
- Interest in marginalised groups
- Present-day analogies, processes
- Contemporary personal accounts
- Politics of disciplinary discourse
- Analytical and project skills outcome



Creating a context for learning

- Teaching as facilitating student learning
- Students are regarded as individuals
- Build conditions that encourage a deep engagement with the subject
- Make students' expression grow
- Choosing the right subject



Strategies for active classroom learning

- Clarity about shared responsibility
- Teacher lectures / student presentations
- Mixture of approaches
- Self-reflection on the quality of teaching judged from the relation between teacher intentions and actual teacher accomplishments



Situational relevance

- Not only internal understanding of theory
- More than just insight in knowledge in itself
- Define situations where theory is relevant for reality
- Move back and forth between abstract social theory and embedded empirical analysis
- Student identification with subject\theory



Understanding and history skills

- Minds do not reflect reality directly...
- But through varying conventions, schemata, and stereotypes
- What faculty teach is not identical to what students learn
- Students must transform data into knowledge themselves
- Active learning methods emphasizing participation, collaboration, and independence will help
- Connecting to student experience



Deep approach to understanding

- Active work up of material as contrary to memorising of curriculum
- Ideas connected to existing knowledge
- Notions must relate to experiences
- Conclusions must be compared with premises
- Logic of arguments must be verified
- Integration of elements and examples to general principles



Using points and examples

- Students will understand from parts\details
- A package solution cannot be communicated
- The teacher must break down his overall understanding to its parts
- Case studies, telling examples help



Basic techniques and teaching tools I

- Points should not necessarily be verbalised by the teacher, but understood through tools
- Using coherences, arguments, overviews as components of understanding
- Role play, students as historical agents
- Provoke students to disagree
- Meeting parties and experts
- Interviews and guest lectures
- Excursions to involved institutions



Basic techniques and teaching tools II

- Brainstorming
- Truth statements by students
- Pyramid-crossover subgroup discussions
- Case studies and simulations
- Counterfactual plays
- Storyboards
- Visuals, arts, photographs
- Hands on primary sources
- Student stories, autobiographies



Logic and systematic

- Situational point of departure
- The succession of problems controls interplay between students
- Session plan together with frequent summarisation permit focus on points



Synchronising, manipulating, and explicitating

- Psychological connection to student expectations from the first lesson
- Making students think synchronous is part of class-room pedagogic rationale
- Creation of mental togetherness through common agenda
- Building students awareness of strategy and goals



The course plan

- Coherence and progression in lessons
- Theory / empirical facts / practice
- Reorganise the usual 2x14 hours
- Clarity about the preparation required before each lesson



Preparing a lesson or presentation I

Analysing the situation

- When, how, and with what purpose are the students expected to use the theory
- What points\elements are necessary for understanding
- How to remove mental blocking of new knowledge
- Thinking out components necessary for understanding the points



Preparing a lesson \ presentation II

The outline

- Plan sequence of points to make the course logical to participants
- Divide the lesson in phases
- Decide the best form for each phase



Preparing a lesson \ presentation III

The plan in detail

- Design tools for best understanding of single points
- Construct basic techniques
- Provide documentation of arguments



The classical lecture / teacher presentation I

- Inform about lecture framework and when moving through parts
- Present information not available to students otherwise, typically ...
- Heavy theoretical introductions, own research, internal professional debates
- Relate to reality, listeners, earlier lessons etc.



The classical lecture / teacher presentation II

- Coming up



Craftsmanship in teaching

- Professional presence, commitment
- Distance, breadth of view
- Organise group discussion, plenum summing up
- Permanent experimental development
- Creation of participant activity
- Activation of learner experiences
- Listening-comprehension, empathy
- Establish equal dialog
- Speak/explain distinct, well-structured
- Create illustrating teaching material
- Learn from criticism and evaluation



Promoting independence in learning

- Coming up



Using assessment to improve understanding

- All examination ought to consist of several phases, including a “peer review” with possibility of response\defence
- Coming up



Developing understanding of teaching

- Coming up



Students' choice of supervisor

- Must have broad professional knowledge and empathy
- Understands and respects your intentions and level of ambition
- Prepares sessions on the basis of your material
- Emphasizes good text elements



A supervisor should advice on I

- Particular subject area
- Broad on specific discipline / profession
- Scientific, analytical methods
- Processes of investigation and writing
- Textual, literary side
- Personal study problems



A supervisor should advice on II

- Important early phase considerations
- Ideas on problem formulation
- Relevance of objective
- Choice of methodology
- Elaboration of research design
- Delimitation and focus
- Empirical foundations
- Meaning and use of concepts
- Coherence and logic
- Level of abstraction
- Viability of conclusions



Early process advice on

- Methodology
- Study procedure
- Sources, texts, foundations
- Framework, outline
- Writing sample, draft chapter
- Ethical problems in source use



Good advice should be.. I

- A professional meeting...
- Not a private conversation
- Constructive, forward-looking...
- Not only commenting results
- Binding; teacher can't criticise choices, if advice is followed
- Taking the student seriously at any given level, which could mean rejecting the project



Good advice should be.. II

- Flexible in regard to academic work practice
- Open for discussion on theories, content, structure, procedure
- Clear on criteria of quality and means of improvement



Supervision should not be..

- Tutoring stuff the student could read
- Taking over project decisions
- Psychological therapy
- Making the student work for the supervisor
- Last minute redaction and rectifying service



Myths on paper writing and presentation

- All supervisors will tell you not to use jargon and to be clear and straightforward...
- Don't believe them; academics are easily impressed, and you will score better marks, if you write as abstract and complex as you can



Student responsibilities while supervised

- It's not a partnership, student owns the project
- The student is the dynamic promoter
- Be clear on ambitions and deadline
- Mail written inputs in time before sessions
- Limit material and avoid nebulous talk
- Formulate your needs and problems
- Make clear what advice you need
- Show up with specific plans/ideas
- Self-evaluation of your material
- Ask for criteria for assessment
- You don't have to follow all advice



A lecturer's teaching portfolio

- Reflections on professional activities
- Statements of teaching philosophy
- Educational aims and objectives
- Teaching and learning methods
- Teaching plans and materials
- Syllabi, handouts, student work, examination feedback
- Testimonies, evidence of outcomes
- Student/institutional evaluations
- Continued study of education
- Publications on teaching/learning



Useful teaching material/elements

- Videos
- Coming up...



Literature

- Booth, Alan, Teaching history at university: enhancing learning and understanding, New York, Routledge, 2003
- Rienecker, Harboe & Jørgensen, Vejledning - en brugsbog, Samfundslitteratur, 2005
- Coming up...



Teaching History and African Studies

The end...

Comments from colleagues and students on this presentation will be appreciated

