Higher Education Research Network Journal
Prizewinning Essays

Volume 7

Editors: Dr Deesha Chadha and Dr David B. Hay
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Editors’ Introduction

Dr Deesha Chadha and Dr David B. Hay

Welcome to the fourth edition of HERN J’s prize-winning essays. In this volume we gather together essays exploring teaching in a variety of subject settings, but joined by a collective search for a new potential identity in higher education. These essays are all written by ‘newer’ researcher-teachers. Perhaps because of this there is a certain sincerity about them: certainly a freshness and an honesty whereby all these authors are writing about themselves; their experiences; and pointing towards a way of teaching which includes individuality, but also relationship towards the self and (an)other. Of course these are big issues, but in the minutiae of experiential scrutiny, perhaps it becomes possible to visualise what is in higher education: identity and becoming in the context of new knowledge-making (for example see Latour, 1987).

In this volume, Nishanthan Srikantha writes about the ‘uniform’ of teachers and the ways that dress necessarily impinges on the perception and responses of our students. But going deeper than this, using empirical research Nishanthan is pointing to our presentation as external but the reflection of what actually occurs more internally: closer to the boundary of thought and action. In this way Nishanthan uses ‘dress’ as proxy for analysis of power, authority and identity externally; but also perhaps more subtly energy; relationship; all of which need to be scrutinised in the development of pedagogy (for example Morley, 2003). Perhaps different perceptions of the qualities of ‘teacher’ in students’ minds are really measures of responses to a move in power.

Likewise, Thomas White and Jeffery Garmany open up the question of the subjective self whereby student experience reflects back upon the developing teacher. Both these authors scrutinise themselves: Thomas White in the setting of supervision of masters’ dissertations and Jeffery Garmany in interdisciplinary teaching settings. Together they call us to acknowledge that our attitudes, behaviours and correspondences, while beginning as internal factors, inevitably lead to external consequences for our students while these are then internalised by them to develop us as teachers so long as we are sensitive and strong enough to bear that reciprocity of teaching data. In this way these authors orientate us towards a deep and vital question: ‘who is responsible in the classroom?’

This theme is also taken up by Hannah Crummé and Stacey Gutkowski. For these two the challenge is to internalise and articulate what it means to innovate in teaching practice; to inform new habits as teachers by reflecting on the student learning experience. In her essay, Hannah Crummé uses the example of close reading; a particularly crucial skill amongst students studying the English Language. Hannah presents a case study of her classroom in which she attempts to teach her students to use their contextual observations to inform their reading practices. Thus she points to methods of integrating close reading in seminar based discussions. Effectively, she suggests that talk (discussion) is also ‘reading’ and vice versa, reading is discussion (see also Weller, 2010). Similarly, Stacey Gutkowski shows us how
she embraces the notion of inquiry-based learning in teaching Middle Eastern Studies to postgraduates in order to re-vitalise the dialogue which is inter textual (see Kristeva, 1980; Wegerif, 2007). Her attempts are aimed at fostering critical thinking through a broader appreciation of the teaching-research nexus. Both Hannah and Stacey like all our other authors remind us that (potentially) the inner and the outer correspond.

The essay by Kim Ashton, a musician, uses a carefully constructed argument to explain that in the language of music, there is both syncopation and degrees of harmony to be found between the ‘student’ and ‘teacher’ voice. Kim rephrases the work of Haggis (2009) to suggest that when the student voice cannot be heard we should always ask ourselves ‘who or what are we thinking of?’ while also acknowledging that it is possible to listen – even silently – in essentially creative ways. By another turn of phrase, Kim is stating that evaluation of student reciprocity ought to take precedence over the assessment of a lecturers’ isolated performance alone: in the first analysis education exists only in its dialogue.

Collectively and drawn together here, these essays exhibit a desire for change focusing perhaps towards what Rowan Williams takes as being generative in higher education (Williams, 1986) where in our experience of events – each one of them transactions – we potentially create new frames of reference which initiate new possibilities of life.

**References**


Reflections on the gathering of student feedback: an evaluative case study

Kim B Ashton
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Introduction

‘The current climate in higher education suggest that students could be seen as primary customers who are increasingly aware of their customer rights, one of which is regularly exercised through formal and informal feedback processes. If teachers in higher education are becoming framed as service providers, then one way to ensure the provision of a quality service is to know the expectations of customers. Education has typically adopted an “inside out” approach, with those in the inside assuming that they know what students need and what they expect the teacher to give. However, successful service industries have been shown to think “outside in”.’
(Sander et al., 2000, p. 309)

The importance of giving regular feedback on their work to students in higher education cannot be underestimated, and often takes place in a number of ways, both verbally or informally as well as in writing. The reverse process, whereby students offer their thoughts and feedback on their teachers, lecturers, and courses, is, however, often seen by both staff and students as less important or even ineffective (Light et al., 2009); indeed, the process may fail to engage students, while making academics feel ‘anxious and defensive’ (ibid., p. 237). This essay will examine some of the various reasons for which such student-to-teacher or student-to-institution feedback is gathered, alongside a discussion of some of the associated problems which can be encountered. This will form the basis for a reflection on a recent feedback gathering process which I went through after giving a short course of music analysis lectures at the University of Cambridge. I will end by offering some thoughts on how this process might be improved, with a particular focus on ways of gathering and implementing student feedback which I could then put into practice in future, for example during a full terms’ course that I will be giving at King’s College London next year.

Reasons for gathering feedback

The reasons for gathering feedback might be grouped loosely into two regions: exogenous influences coming from outside forces such as the National Student Survey (NSS) or the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), alongside what might be seen as ‘internal’ reasons, which relate to the improvement of courses and the continuing professional development of teaching staff. The former might be seen to be acting on an institution-wide level, with the concern to maintain and improve standards being particularly important in the current socio-financial context, where students (‘consumers’) are becoming more discerning at the same time as external funding sources are shrinking. While many resist the notion of student as consumer, and although alternative evaluative bodies do exist (for example in the US the National Survey of Student Engagement focuses on student experience rather than satisfaction), nevertheless in the UK good results from such influential bodies as the NSS and
QAA seem to be of critical and increasing importance in the attraction of prospective students. In addition, former students are often of vital importance to an institution not only in terms of more or less formal marketing (which ranges from word of mouth to, for example, the famous alumni celebrated along the front of King’s Strand Campus), but also for financial reasons (every university has its alumni development department). For all these reasons, as Coates has argued (2006, p.168), ‘as higher education institutions seek to become ever more responsive to emerging commercial, educational, international and strategic trends, it seems likely that the kind of feedback students can provide will become ever more important.’

The internal reasons might also be split into two regions, although the distinction is not watertight. On the institution’s side, feedback can feed into the improvement of course content or teaching milieu, as well as help teachers or lecturers to enhance their practice in any number of ways; this might be seen as a department or faculty asking its students to assess it as it is now. From the students’ side, giving feedback can help to ‘legitimate students as stakeholders in the educational process’ (ibid., p. 167) – in other words, the process can show students that their input on matters pertaining to course content and delivery, as well as to wider faculty, department, or university-wide issues, is taken seriously. Furthermore – although this is very much dependent on the kind of feedback process undertaken, as well as the willingness and ability of the institution or of individual members of staff to implement suggestions – the giving of feedback can have an immediate impact on students’ experience; an area of particular interest and importance here is that of the learning milieu, as will be discussed further below. Indeed, if well planned and implemented, the evaluation process can even become ‘an engaged process which itself facilitates... students’ learning and self knowledge, helping them to explore the strengths, weaknesses, inhibitions and styles of their thinking and working’ (Light et al., 2009, p. 269), thus transforming what can be seen as an exercise with little meaning for students into a process which feeds into their development as life-long learners.

While Coates lists such additional uses as ‘informing selection procedures, determining how to leverage students’ energy for learning, and placing university study in broader careers and employment contexts’ (2006, p. 168), Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick take a simpler view, focusing on what I have termed the internal institutional side. The three areas they highlight are as follows: ‘the most common reason is that evaluation can tell us how to improve future programs. The second reason is to determine whether a program should be continued or dropped. The third is to justify the existence of the training department and its budget’ (2006, p. 19). Their final reason seems particularly prescient in times when some universities are having to severely reduce the budget allocated to certain departments, if not shut them down entirely.

Problems related to the gathering of feedback

As Light et al., (2009) suggest there may be little enthusiasm on either side (learner or teacher) for the evaluative process. As my own experience would suggest, it is common for feedback forms to be given out at the end of a term’s lectures, or even at the end of a whole course, thus lending the whole process an at best ‘altruistic’ tone (since the students themselves will not benefit from the implementations of their suggestions with regard to the course or its delivery, any such changes only benefitting students in the future). The abstract quality this can give the process, which thereby lacks personal relevance, can result in forms being carelessly filled in if at all.
Students may also be concerned that the faculty is merely ‘going through the motions’: that is, once filled in, such forms will be filed and forgotten about. As Light et al. (2009) note, if the process is not to be a waste of time, enough time and thought must be given to its development and implementation. What one might call ‘the bottom drawer problem’ is not just a problem for students, however: course leaders and teachers cannot improve their course or performance without access to the assessment data.

Another problem is encountered in universities such as the University of Cambridge, where course teaching is very often divided between lectures and small group supervisions, with less attention than might be expected paid to how these two strands relate to each other. This means that feedback gathered by the faculty (which relates mostly to the courses of lectures) is separate from any feedback which may be gathered by the Universities on students’ supervisions. In such a case the normal difficulties of taking on board suggestions or complaints must be compounded.

Finally, the question of how to actually go about gathering this feedback is often a difficult and complex area. According to Light et al. ‘the technology of evaluation has often been described as ideology in disguise’ (ibid., p. 239). Even if an institution is only concerned with assessing the success of a course as it stands (in other words, if it is not open to ‘ideological’ suggestions or questioning), a lot of thought must go into a feedback form in order for its results to be meaningful. For example, a form involving numerical tick-boxes, where one end of the scale is always ‘positive’ while the other is always ‘negative’ is in danger of being carelessly filled in: in my recent experience, while some forms showed a nuanced range of numerical values, on other forms the choice of one number (be it the average ‘3’, or the good ‘4’) ticked in all columns suggested a hurried and perhaps not particularly thoughtful approach, which brings into question the value of the data.

The complexity of questionnaire design is such that, Oppenheim (1992) suggests, we must continually strive to understand our goals. In other words, if questionnaire designers are not absolutely clear about what information they are seeking, the results may be disappointing or haphazard. Moreover, the tension between qualitative and quantitative data may not be easily resolved, with the various needs of different parties being in conflict. For example, an institution may be more interested in quantitative data which it can use internally to assess how well departments are performing, or ‘externally’ to market the university (if results show high student satisfaction, or the success of its teaching models or course programmes). Teachers, on the other hand, may well be more interested in qualitative data, which can offer a more nuanced and complex impression of a course or its delivery; the kinds of personally informed responses which qualitative enquiries generate are likely to be more illuminating to an individual teacher or lecturer than a collection of numerical scores on their performance.

**Case study at the University of Cambridge: the background**
In Lent term 2012 I gave a series of lectures in Music Analysis to second year undergraduates at the University of Cambridge. Of the second year’s two compulsory papers, this is the only one taught through lectures. The course takes place over two terms, and is split into lectures on 19th- and 20th-century analysis; these are given on alternate weeks.
Figure 1. Faculty of Music Lecture/Seminar Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Title: ___________________________</th>
<th>Term/Year: ______________</th>
<th>How many lectures have you attended? ___</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please tick the appropriate boxes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of lectures</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of lectures</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Musical illustrations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual aids</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Handouts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

How do you think the course could be improved?

Comments on the relationship between supervisions/lecture course:

Other comments (please continue overleaf if necessary):
through the eight weeks of each term. In the Lent term, I gave four lectures on 20th century analysis, with the other four lectures (on the 19th century) given by a number of other lecturers. This being my first experience lecturing, I was keen to get some evaluation of my performance, in order to check that I was delivering the lectures at an acceptable speed, and that I was operating on the right intellectual plane, going into an appropriate level of detail, giving enough examples, and so forth. To this end, at the end of the first lecture I handed out a number of postcards which read ‘What do you think?’ on one side, and encouraged students to fill these in or to email me with any thoughts or suggestions (or leave anonymous feedback in my pigeonhole if they felt so inclined). This had a dual purpose: both to ensure that I was doing as good a job as possible, for personal satisfaction and professional development, and in order that my lectures were as helpful (and inspiring) as possible for the students. In the event, I only received one postcard back, which offered such a glowing endorsement that I even wondered briefly if it was a hoax. The completely open – and optional – nature of my request for feedback (of any kind, and on any aspect of the lecture) was perhaps a weakness, in that I only received one response (had I asked more specific questions either verbally or in writing on the postcard, I might have received more response). On the other hand, as is the case when the space is left totally open to the respondent, the evaluation was personal and nuanced and offered both general commentary and specific thoughts on which aspects of my lecture had been most helpful and interesting. At the opposite end of the scale from the kind of quantitative data (from a large ‘consumer base’) which an institution might find useful, this relatively informal and wholly qualitative data was of exactly the kind which I was hoping for – if in slightly larger numbers.

The formal feedback procedure
At the end of the final lecture, according to normal Music Faculty procedure, I handed out the form in Figure 1.

When reading the completed forms through (before returning to the faculty administrator) I realized that I had not been clear about what the questionnaires were referring to: while some students had filled them in with regard to my four lectures, others had thought that they were reviewing the whole term’s analysis lectures, or even the whole year’s lectures. As a result, while all of the data may have been pertinent on administrative or statistical levels – for example, several students bemoaned the fact that, due to sabbatical leave, the course’s lectures had been given by a miscellaneous handful of different lecturers (rather than the normal two), which detracted from their sense of course continuity – much of it did not relate to my own performance, which I found to be a disappointment.

As a new lecturer wishing to hone my craft, the forms on which boxes had been ticked without additional comment were as good as useless, even where the student had indicated that he or she was evaluating my four lectures, and not the whole term’s or year’s. Forms with written comments, however, did offer the possibility of constructive criticism or feedback, of which the two most useful were a request that in future I supply my references on the handout or online (rather(6,3),(994,989)
me to continue to engage directly with the audience – that is, to ask them questions, and to address their concerns in real time. In other words, the off-script demonstrations and moments when we engaged in dialogue were instrumental in keeping my audience involved (and conscious). Two important concerns of Light et al. (2009) are echoed here. The first relates to the 'liveness' of the situation. As they note, ‘being live provides a wonderful opportunity for engagement and dialogue’. In the ideal situation, the lecturer is psychosomatically at ease, and while remaining the focus of the group's attention, is committed to a dialogic relationship with the group; dialogue presupposes a liveness which is less likely to be in evidence if the lecturer simply reads his or her notes. All too often, however, this liveness is castrated by the lecturer’s failure to be ‘fully engaged as a person’ (ibid., p. 109), either through discomfort or through a belief that a lecturer is merely a transmitter of content. The less ‘live’ the situation is, the less students are likely to be able to maintain concentration (and thus learning), perhaps even descending to the extreme state which Bligh calls ‘deep coma’ (2005, p. 50).

The second point touched on in this specific piece of feedback relates to the flexibility of teaching—learning methods that Light et al. (2009) offer as one successful model (2009, p. 121). Rather than a 90-minute monologue, as this student suggested, a format where ‘standard’ lecturing was interspersed with dialogue, real-time demonstration, and even small-group activities (on which more later) is likely to be much more inspiring and meaningful for students. While Bligh suggests that students tend only to concentrate well for about 10-15 minutes without the kind of break that a change in activity provides, there are also echoes here of several of Paulo Freire’s learning concepts. Madron states that ‘teaching based on individual monologues leads to silence and apathy, and is the ultimate form of oppression’, while following Freire in his belief that ‘dialogue liberates [while] monologue represses’, as well as stressing the idea that dialogue-rich groups are the ideal learning environments (2003, p. 114).

The encouragement to continue engaging which I received, with its reference to alternative learning contexts, also offers an interesting commentary on the design of the questionnaire: although space is allowed for free comment, the focus of the form visually – and thus, we assume, its real concern – is the quality of the lectures themselves, with content of the highest importance (it is, after all, the first column). Notwithstanding my earlier comments earlier on the relative unhelpfulness of comment-free numerical values, the form is designed to enable lecturers to hone their craft – or, alternatively, to enable the faculty to provide the best lectures possible. However, the very categories used (content, delivery, illustrations, handouts, etc.) convey a perhaps old-fashioned and completely lecturer-centered pedagogy based on performance. The questionnaire proceeds from a staff- or faculty- led perspective, rather than a student one, which might ask first what the students want or need to enhance their learning, or which environments they have found most conducive to learning. While such an approach would presumably be of most use to (future) students if suggested changes were implement – empowering students to affect directly the methods by which (and the contexts in which) they were taught – equally, the suggestions which would result from such an inquiry could be of much more use to teachers than a simple numerical judgment of performance.

Although there is space on the questionnaire to comment on the relationship between students’
supervisions and the lecture course, as a supervisor at a range of colleges for several years, I have never had any feedback from this source, and in fact was not aware that students were invited to comment on this area. The focus of the form is clearly the lecture course, with the column relating to supervisions looking like a later addition to the form (note the different font); moreover, students are asked to give one numerical value to the whole supervision experience, even though supervisions are a critically important part of the learning process (indeed, they are sometimes seen as more important: while attendance at supervision is mandatory, while lectures are often seen as optional, with attendance at my lectures peaking at thirty, or half the year group).

Reflections on future evaluative processes
My subsequent reflection on the experience of this evaluative process focuses on two key areas. I will start with a consideration of the evaluative process itself, thinking particularly about some of the different means by which feedback might be gathered, as well as about how such processes might be integrated into students’ learning experiences. I will then reflect on the implications of the piece of feedback I received which touched on learning contexts, in the hope that I might be able to design flexible teaching methods to apply in future lecturing or large-group teaching situations, the first of which will be the course in music analysis that I am running at King’s next year.

Commenting on the post-tutorial evaluation, Stevenson et al. (1996) note that ‘these evaluations tend to be rushed and hurried and often simply reflect perfunctory ticks in boxes’. They go on to propose the use of pre-course surveys of students, which offer the chance to negotiate methods and contexts of learning and teaching (in the case of their study asking students what their preferences were for the use of tutorial time).

‘A significant number of students wrote enthusiastically about being involved in expressing their views on what was important to them as end users of the tutorial process suggest[ing] that asking the students what they expected from a tutor was an area of enquiry that students welcomed. As one student added on the end of her questionnaire, “It’s nice to be asked for a change, it really made me think about how I like to learn”’ (p. 28).

Although their study considers the tutorial in the context of distance learning, aspects of their approach – where students give feedback before the end of the course, if not before it begins – could certainly be adapted to a lecturing or large-group teaching context. This could also be seen as a more formal version of my ‘What do you think’ postcard. Beyond the benefits already mentioned, ‘the responsive nature of the [pre-course questionnaire] model also encourages students to take a greater interest in their learning, which in turn promotes feelings of ownership and partnership in the learning experience’ (Sander et al., 2000: p. 310), with Stevenson et al. (1996) noting that their programme seemed to increase attendance. In the context of a lecture course which half the year-group regularly fails to attend, this could clearly be an avenue worth pursuing.

Their approach also clearly starts from an interest in what the student needs in order to enhance his or her learning, rather than proceeding from what might be seen as a teacher-led
paradigm. A questionnaire can obviously draw on both these perspectives. Some methods of gathering feedback, however, particularly those which might be seen as ‘evaluation-in-action’, can offer instant data on student experience, and these need not be limited to small-group situations. Light et al. (2009) discuss the benefits of interactive teaching, involving such activities as reflective moments, partner work, and ‘buzz groups’, any of which can – and often do – address evaluative questions alongside discussions of content. Indeed, such collapsing of the divide between learning and evaluation is common in such classroom assessment techniques as developed by Angelo and Cross (1993). Specific learning problems can be identified and addressed in real time, with the evaluative process thus becoming an integral part of the students’ learning. Beyond being a helpful exercise with regard to course improvement or via adjustments to the learning context, such practices can serve to foster the habit of reflection in students, helping them to become life-long learners and ‘genuinely reflective professionals’ (Light et al., 2009, p. 269).

A particular strength of these methods of evaluation in action is that they take place in real time, or at least during the evolving progress of a course. They thus sidestep the problem I encountered after my lectures (when I omitted to say who or what exactly the questionnaires were to be filled in with reference to) since it is clear that they are immediately applicable. In cases of more formal feedback gathering, I will henceforth aim to be clear that I am requesting feedback for the current students’ sake (if possible), as well as to help improve course content or delivery, more than for future or statistical purposes. This will encourage students to invest more thought and creativity in the evaluation process, which in turn will result in the process having more meaning for them (relating as it will to their own life-long learning), as well as having more relevance to my own continuing professional development.

When designing future questionnaires, it is this student-led paradigm which I would hope to focus on. Rather than one summative questionnaire at the end of a course, I would hope to use a number of smaller, formative questionnaires given out during the process of a course, even after the first lecture, as I did at the University of Cambridge. Questions such as ‘what is the most important thing you learnt during the session’ (Light et al., 2009, p. 254) help students to consolidate their key insights, while giving the teacher a useful gauge of what students have learnt, and what they have found most interesting or stimulating, all of which can help focus future discussion. Open questions about the session’s format – for example, a simple invitation to comment on the structure – or more focused questions such as ‘which aspects of the session did you find most conducive to learning, and were there any which challenged your learning?’ would encourage students to reflect on their preferred methods of or contexts for learning, at the same time as offering the teacher valuable feedback on the learning context and structure of the session.

At the course’s halfway point, if not before, I would hope to ask for slightly more extensive feedback, focusing on such questions as ‘How do you think the course is going? Which aspects do you find most helpful, and what would you like to see more of – or less of – in the second half of the course?’ One way to get away from the problem of end-of-session haste in the offering of evaluation would be to ask the students to fill in this second questionnaire at the beginning of, or part-way through a session; in the case of questions which relate to the
course or its delivery as a whole, there is no need to wait till the end of a particular lecture. Depending on the feeling in the group, rather than being a written forum, this gathering of evaluation could take the form of a group discussion. Doing such an exercise verbally can help students to see the similarities as well as the differences in their preferred learning methods.

Integral as I believe student-centered evaluation must be, there is nevertheless a danger in allowing students to become the only adjudicators of higher education teaching performance. While space does not permit in-depth exploration of the subject, my discussion thus far has not touched on the complex and important issue of the relationship of student feedback to other sources of evaluation, which could include observations from peers or educationalists. The question of whether students are the ‘experts’ on teaching and learning is moot; while their input is clearly of key importance, I suggest that it would ideally form part of a rich evaluative framework in which feedback is also received from subject peers and from educationalist colleagues as part of formal and/or informal observation processes. The very different and possibly contradictory perspectives that these groups could offer would provide the teacher with a very rich territory for reflection and professional development. Finally, self-evaluation should not be ignored: alongside gathering student feedback during a course, teachers could be encouraged to reflect more formally on their own practice, noting down such inevitable thoughts as ‘I’ll do this differently next time’ which may otherwise be forgotten.

**Reflections on teaching-learning contexts**

Given all that has been said about the weaknesses of the monologic lecture, as well the importance of incorporating techniques which can give instant feedback on the state of students’ learning (and their relationship to the learning context), I am hoping to design a flexible teaching environment which I can put into practice during the course I am teaching at King’s next year. This will build on what I have learnt from my lecturing experience at the University of Cambridge, as well as from my reflections on other aspects of my teaching practice, particularly the insights into (small-) group management that I have gained through supervising. Since the course draws heavily on a reader (with texts and musical scores), there is a lot of scope for group discussion – or individual presentations – although this relies to an extent on students coming prepared. On the plus side, the relatively small class size (circa 20 students) makes the group one where individual voices can certainly be heard and valued. I hope, then, to design lectures where periods of lecturing are regularly and frequently interspersed with moments for solitary reflection, short individual presentations, work in pairs or small groups, as well as whole group discussion. Alongside requesting written feedback, I will also invite informal feedback during sessions.

**Conclusions**

My experience of a written feedback process at the end of a series of lectures was of limited value to me as an aspiring lecturer, as the questionnaire focused on assigning numerical values rather than offering the kind of qualitative commentary that is personally most helpful. Furthermore, I was struck by how the form was primarily faculty led, being designed to ascertain how well lecturers were performing, rather than proceeding from a position interested in how to enhance student learning. One comment, however, did spur me into
thinking about how lecturing works best when interspersed with other, more dialogic, learning contexts, echoing Freire’s conception that dialogue liberates (while monologue represses). When designing a course in future, I will draw such thinking in order to create varied and engaging learning concepts, alongside integrating student-led feedback mechanisms into the body of the course, both during individual sessions and through invitations to reflect on the course as it unfolds.

In the words of Dai Hounsell (HEA York, 2010): ‘If the purpose of higher education is not just to acquire knowledge, skills and understanding in the discipline but also to develop in students the ability to monitor, evaluate and regulate their own learning, then there must be a shift from teacher regulation to learner regulation over the course of an undergraduate degree’, and I believe that student-led evaluation processes must be at the heart of this shift.

References


Close reading in the undergraduate classroom

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‘Close reading’ is a skill at the foundation of the English degree; it requires students to examine the language of the text and analyse how linguistic style contributes to works’ meanings. It exercises students’ observation and argumentation, thus emphasizing transferable skills from the moment they begin their university-level study. This reflective case study addresses the problem of incorporating close reading into the seminar meetings of a cross-period first-year survey course in the English department of King’s College London. The place of close reading in the seminar classroom has long been assumed by critics. In his seminal 1945 article ‘The Problem of the English Major’ Herbert Weisinger explains that

‘the use of the small seminar makes possible better teaching; instead of the instructor’s being compelled to lecture to large groups, careful analysis of the texts themselves by a class under the guidance of the teacher results in close reading and sober judgment.’ (p. 245)

Heather Mills later explains ‘close reading is basic to the pedagogic practice we tend to value most highly, the detailed discussion that takes place in the seminar session’ (1991, p. 195). Restated and affirmed by generations of subsequent critics, I believe that Weisinger’s and Mill’s assumption that close reading is inherent in the seminar structure needs nuance. I will show that, while educational theorists and members of English faculties in the United States and Britain consistently assume both the importance of close reading to the practice of literary analysis and its natural place in the seminar classroom, in fact it is difficult to facilitate this practice amongst undergraduate students, particularly in their first year in a higher education institution and that educators’ failure to do so is reflected in the essays produced for the end-of-year exams. Saranne Weller details the disparity between educators expectations of student reading practices and students’ abilities upon entering higher education (2010) so I will not describe this inconsistency at length. Yet it is essential that first year students learn to integrate close reading into classroom discussion, combining knowledge of the texts’ context and plot with close analysis of the author’s use of language. I believe that it does students a disservice to assume that they enter university with these skills already integrated into their academic repertoire. I will first discuss the learning objectives of my particular course, then the importance of close reading to students’ learning experience, and finally address how I introduced innovations to my classroom to facilitate student engagement with the texts. I will consider how to integrate literary analysis in order to best prepare students both for their exams and to identify the transferable skills of their degree to their future work and study.

The module ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts to English Literature’, convened by Doctor Rivkah Zim, is a required first-year survey course in the English department structured around weekly lectures and seminars. While each lecture offered students an excellent example of a
single close textual analysis, the students had difficulty translating this into vibrant discussion or personal engagement with the language of the literature. ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts’ aims to introduce students to the inheritance of classical and biblical texts and traditions in English literature. The module assumes that authors are affected by their own cultural framework and thus that their writing reflects an awareness of topics common to education in their generation. Thus the lectures emphasize the authors’ likely experience with classical and biblical sources as an important element of interpretation of the materials read for the course. The module provides students with experience identifying literary forms, themes, and characteristic sensibilities of ancient Greece, Rome, and Israel, as the source of English literary allusions. Ideally, bearing these contexts in mind, students are able to derive a more complete and informed reading of English literature. As I will discuss below, current educational theory in English departments is focused on how to integrate an understanding of literary contexts (and at times contemporary social contexts) into undergraduate education, a problem ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts’ should be well-positioned to solve. However, I noticed that while my students became very adept at spotting references to the authors’ personal and literary contexts and demonstrating where the author drew from knowledge of either the Bible or classical sources, they did not pair these observations with close consideration of the language and artistry of the text. This stopped the students from achieving the course outcome, to develop complex insight into the works as literature, as set by the Doctor Zim, the course convenor. Immersed in context, the students began to treat text as merely a historical artefact or a puzzle in which references to obscure and outdated works were to be found. The lectures provided the students with the information they needed; as the seminar leader I needed to motivate my students to combine their understanding of each work’s context with close engagement with the text’s language.

English literature studies are no longer focused on attaining knowledge of a specific set of works, but rather are geared towards the development of a specific skill set, primary of which is close reading. The ‘cannon’ of English literature has expanded exponentially so as to lose much meaning and all teachability. It is impossible to include most works of value. Because of this, curriculums across the country and throughout the world vary wildly. The skill of close reading, and the logical analysis that naturally accompanies it, is one of the few unifying features of the discipline (Stunkel, 1989, p. 329). The need for standardization within English (and the humanities more generally) as a discipline was articulated by Karl Mannheim (1943) which highlights that ‘we do not even agree as to whether this great variety of opinions is good or bad’ (p.17) much less on which isolated works are worthy of inclusion on a relatively limited undergraduate syllabus. The search for ‘value’ developed into the contemporary desire to see transferable skills for employability at the base of most university education, leading to a class of graduates prepared to enter the work force with skills acquired at university. This contributed to the modern curricular preference in favour of close textual analysis, which fosters students’ ability with linguistic observation, articulation, and argumentation; it is easy to see why literature remains a course which is central to many British and American institutions. However, if this type of hyper-analytical engagement with text is to be the unifying element of the course, both within King’s and throughout the world, it must feature prominently in each seminar, and not be the reserve of isolated examinations and essays.
As is true in most classes in the English department, the students attend lectures once a week for their ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts’ course, supplemented by a weekly hour-long meeting with a seminar group made up of about seventeen students. The students must read a new English literary work each week, as well as the relevant classical and or biblical primary sources. While the lectures explicate the larger themes of the course as they relate to the text of the week, the seminars focus on developing the students’ creative thought around the text. Ideally, the seminars are a forum in which the students build elegant close reading that furthers their understanding of the text through collaboration with their peers as well as an opportunity to extend and clarify their understanding of the classical and biblical contexts of the texts they have read. The students in my seminar groups came to class prepared; while reading they had noted where they saw references to classical and biblical works, and they were keen to point these out in class. However, their observations were almost always limited to highlighting a point in the literature that alluded to another source; when pressed to explain the meaning of the passage or the effect its inclusion in the work had on the reader they were silent. Similarly, when I opened the question to the class students were very unwilling to distil a nuanced reading of the text from the allusion in question. I believe this was due to a lack of self-confidence and a fear of the judgement of their peers, should their reading prove at fault. Comfortable with the relatively uncreative work of identifying references (which they had often confirmed with secondary sources before class), students were afraid that a creative reading might reveal some flaw in their intellect or understanding. This stood in the way of developing their ability to work collaboratively with their class to produce a close analysis of the text. In the rest of this case study I will discuss how I adjusted my teaching practice to address the students’ anxiety about close reading while effectively encouraging them to bring textual analysis into the classroom.

Students enter the English Department particularly ill prepared to produce high-quality readings of literature, leading to this crisis of confidence. While the A-level exams teach students to find particular tropes and themes, they do not encourage the development of critical thought around text. This means that instruction in close reading during the first year is of the highest importance. ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts for English Literature’ is examined only through an end-of-term test, so students do not have any opportunity to develop their close-reading in response to feedback on essays. This made it essential for me to incorporate a focus on close reading into the seminar structure. I hoped to help students transition from the an A-level focus on identification of references and tropes to explications of how these allusions function with the language of the work to endow the text as a whole with greater meaning. Weller found that ‘students... conceptualize reading as evaluating different perspectives, domesticating new experiences into existing personal value schema and apprehending the text as object’ (2010, p. 87). Many of the ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts’ students’ essays confirm Weller’s assessment as they awkwardly and often incorrectly attempt to incorporate elements of their A-levels curriculum in to their assessments (this was most often manifested when students’ produced a ‘reading’ of a text that was reliant on a particular school of criticism that did not align with the goals of the course) or was inappropriately applied to the work in question. Even students who have understood the aim of the course to ‘recognize [and] describe’ classical and biblical contexts for English literary work often treat the texts included in the course as objects, as Weller suggests, merely identifying allusions
without offering further explication to add meaning. These students’ mastery of a factual, historical understanding of the author’s context, paired with their keen ability to spot allusion, stood in the way of their engagement with the text. In their avoidance of close reading, students fail to demonstrate skills of argumentation or interpretation, and instead remained tied to the values created by their end-of-school exams.

The importance of ‘close reading’ to the English degree is assumed, yet very few courses make any attempt to develop students’ expertise or enthusiasm for this mode of critical practice. Because close reading is considered so inherent to reading English at university level I found little research that suggested solutions to my students’ problem. Instead I found myself turning to critical discussions of the opposite kind; many instructors have written about their classes’ difficulty integrating an understanding of a works’ context with their already-extant close reading. Mary R. Lea and Brian V. Street, alongside Theresa Lillis, pioneered a practice through which to develop students’ analytical reading and writing skills at university focused on ‘meaning making, identity, power, and authority’ (2006, p. 369). This ‘academic literacies model’ placed value on the context of the student alongside the text itself (Lillis, 2003, p. 204). Although these approaches were ultimately antithetical to my goal to help students extract greater meaning from solely the work and its context, the academic literacies model had helped students achieve a level of argumentation appropriate to their first-year in university (Lea and Street, 2006, p. 370). I wondered: could practitioners who had developed students’ analytical abilities through a focus on content help me discover a method by which to teach my students to use their contextual observations to inform their close-reading?

The importance of close reading as a skill learned in the early years of undergraduate study is well documented by educational practitioners. Gerald Graff and Andrew Hoberek (1999) demonstrate that even by the end of university students do not completely understand how to integrate close reading with the rest of their scholarship. This basic failure in their English Literature education may hamper their ability to fully realize the transferability of the skills they have learned in their English degree to their future careers or leave them ill prepared for graduate study. Graff and Hoberek argue that, even if students receive adequate instruction in how to close read, so that they think critically and engage with text, they often have difficulty informing their observation with knowledge of works’ context which would further legitimize their study. According to their experience,

‘In our rough estimate, fully 90 per cent of the sample essays that accompany humanities PhD applications are close readings of a single text. With very few exceptions-and these jump out at us because they are so rare these essays plunge immediately into a reading of a text or art work with no explanation of why the writer thought the reading needed to be undertaken in the first place’ (Graff and Hoberek, p. 249)

The problem highlighted by Graff and Hoberek is nearly corrected by ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts for English Literature’. Taught in the second term of the first year of the English degree, the course coincides with lectures in Medieval and Renaissance literature, meaning that students are immersed at this moment in literary history. Furthermore, ‘Classical and
Biblical Contexts’ gives students access to a nuanced understanding of context; by focusing not only on the personal history of a text’s author but also the literary context into which a work entered upon publication, particularly in terms of the cultural assumptions of the author, students are placed in a position to give thoroughly nuanced readings, addressing all the concerns voiced by Graff and Hoberek. As students learn the importance of history to literature in their Medieval and Renaissance modules, ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts’ demonstrates how an author’s personal reading history affects their writing. This realization invigorated my teaching practice as I understood that, if our first year students could master close reading, ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts’ would holistically address most of the skills essential to the first year of undergraduate studies in English. With this in mind, I attempted to revise Graff and Hoberek’s instructions on how to ‘frame the close reading with a meta-commentary that relates it to conversations in the field or the wider culture’, and revise it to help my students apply their growing cultural understanding to their as yet undeveloped skills with close reading (1999, p. 250).

I turned to John K. Young’s who explains:

‘A pedagogy grounded in textual scholarship effectively counter-acts the common reaction that “anything goes” when interpreting literature in an open classroom. Even while texts are interpretively and materially unstable, they still exist in a finite number of versions: there are three Preludes, six versions of Marianne Moore’s “Poetry”, a known and unknown author for Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man. This instability within limits encourages students to understand a material text no longer as a fixed, iconic object, but also not as a freely floating abstraction, unmoored from any reality. Instead, the material text is more firmly grounded in a particular production history than is the usual classroom sense of a text that can be read in any of its various editions, without much or any impact on interpretation’. (2004, p. 636)

Like Graff and Hoberek, Young focuses on means by to encourage students to include context within their close reading. His method of accomplishing this, which grounds students in a firm understanding of the manuscript, print, and circulation history of a text, appealed to me as it approached the methodology of my own research. I began to consider whether exposing students to primary source material, and thus enabling a literal close reading of the original text, could somehow encourage the type of carefully considered linguistic analysis that I hoped to achieve. The course convenor, Doctor Zim, used her own research to inform her lectures; could I incorporate my research with my seminar teaching and thereby offer a model of context-lead close reading to the students? In ‘Research as a Model for University Teaching’ Bruce M. Shore, Susan Picker, and Mary Bates argue for the importance of research-lead teaching specifically within English literature studies (1990). How could I make this work in a seminar setting? I was placed in a position to experiment; the first text of the course is Hamlet, a work my own research has focused on and which has a rich textual history. I encouraged the students to read the work on Early English Books Online (EEBO), emphasizing the importance of noting what edition they read. I extended their assignment, requiring them to read one of the first two quarto editions of the work (printed between 1603 and 1604) as well as the edition in the first folio (1623). The students were to note the
differences and come to class prepared to discuss. When the students arrived at the seminar they seemed to be excited by the textual artefacts they had examined (via EEBO). They enthusiastically raised their hands and highlighted the disparities between the texts. The students who had read the first quarto were excited to announce the huge variance between it and the folio edition. However, when questioned more closely about how these differences changed our understanding of the text the students were again nervous about sharing their insights. In keeping with Weller’s observation, discussed above, the students were uncomfortable using the text as the starting point for creative interpretation, but instead used all three versions of Hamlet as unchangeable objects (2010). I asked about a single line that is missing from the first quarto at the end of Act IV, scene ii; the Queen says ‘Take care of him, Horatio’ in the folio but this line is entirely missing from the first quarto. I asked the class what this revision meant to our understanding of Horatio’s character, but received no response. I was disappointed, until four students approached me after class with their own interpretations, all of which reflected an understanding both for the editions’ contexts and for the language of the work. I was encouraged, but maintained my goal to foster discussion based in close reading in class.

Like my experience in ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts’, Young found it difficult to help students merge explanation of cultural and historical facts with explication of the language of the text. However, unlike Graff, Hoberek, or Young, I found that my students found confidence in factual, historical observations, and that these stood in the way of their close reading. As I wrestled with their difficulty melding the historical knowledge they gained in the lectures with the close reading that they were supposed to intuitively recognize as they basis of their degree I considered what they were willing to discuss as they so deftly avoided close textual analysis. The students focused on the authors’ context and the plot in relation to biblical and classical themes, demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the book but an unwillingness to engage creatively with interpretation. I needed to enliven the students around close reading so that they would amalgamate these two elements of textual criticism in preparation for their exams. Graff and Hoberek explain a study they completed in an effort to encourage close reading:

‘In a class […] on Flannery O’Connor, for example, students who had floundered trying on their own to produce an interesting explication of an O’Connor story did discernibly better when asked to go out and find an article or a book chapter on a story (it doesn’t really matter at this level how good or recent the article is) and disagree with it. Students find it easier to develop their own arguments about the novel’s treatment of race, for example, when they can enter into dialogue with critics who take positions on the question.’ (1999, p. 250)

If others had seen success by encouraging students to engage with arguments that give well contextualized close readings, I thought perhaps my students, who were already imbued with an impressive historical knowledge, might apply this cultural understanding to engage with critics who had produced less contextualized close readings. This would both offer them an example of close reading and encourage them to counter the author’s textual examples with better contextualized quotations. Students would then explicate the language
of the work, draw upon their own contextual understanding, and practice argumentation. As such, I assigned the students weekly articles, relevant to the text they were reading, that offered good examples of close reading but which may or may not have drawn heavily upon an understanding of the work’s context. I required the students to bring a one-page reaction to the text, which they did not turn in to me but were encouraged to incorporate into seminar discussions. This enhanced the students’ learning opportunities by giving them further exposure to secondary source material and raised students’ confidence level as they contributed to class discussion. However, the practice did not facilitate the students’ own creative critical engagement with text through close reading, as they demonstrated a decided tendency to support the critical works they read. Encouragement to disagree with critics substantially reduced students’ comfort in class and led them to resort to solely contextual arguments which were disengaged from the language of the text (and thus were not examples of close reading), as well as from the critical reading they had done.

As part of the course-requirements, each student gave a short (approximately five minute) presentation on a topic relevant to the week’s text once per term. The questions to which the students responded were pre-determined and assigned from the first week of the term. Although these presentations gave students the opportunity to close read, they only focus on one text through this process. Furthermore, their answers were highly researched and rehearsed, meaning that while the presentations offered the opportunity for close reading they did not give students any practice with the skills required by the exam: close engagement with texts without much time to prepare. Their peers did not engage with the presentations, and when asked to discuss the material at hand students rarely offered any insights. I noticed, however, if I asked students to discuss the question in small groups (generally of three) following the presentations, they would occasionally voice a point of disagreement with the presentation. These were always put in terms of ‘we were thinking’, allowing the student to distance themselves from the potentially incorrect statement. It was, however, the first glimmer of critical engagement, improvised in classroom discussion, not wholly dependent on historical context, that I had seen emerge from the seminar. I realized that the students were much more comfortable speaking in front of their peers when using this collective voice. This led me to what would finally be the solution to the problem of engaging the students both with historical context and close textual interpretation.

In the third week of the course students discuss Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The novel draws upon the biblical story of creation (filtered through Milton’s *Paradise Lost*) as well as the classical creation story of Prometheus. Because of these two equally weighted allusions within the story I posed the question to the class ‘Is *Frankenstein* a classical novel or a biblical novel?’. I then constructed a debate. Only twelve of my seventeen students had attended the seminar that day, so I divided the class into two teams of six. I assigned one side the thesis statement ‘*Frankenstein* is a classical novel’ and the other group was given ‘*Frankenstein* is a biblical novel’. Each team was given ten minutes to plan a detailed argument as a group, and then the debate began. The rules were simple:

1. Each team must present three points supporting their thesis.
2. Teams will alternate as they present their three points (ie we heard the first point from the
classical team, followed by the first point from the biblical team, then the second point from the classical team and so forth until each team had presented all three of their points).

3. Following the presentation of each team’s complete evidence, five minutes will be given in which to compose a rebuttal of the other side’s points. This must not be further evidence in favour of your argument but instead must contradict evidence offered by the other side.

4. One point is given for every quotation from Shelley’s novel used either in support of your team’s argument or to counter the argument of the other side.

5. One point is given for contextualization of the quotations used.

6. One point is given for a well-constructed and evidenced close reading of the quotation used.

7. The team with the most points at the end wins.

I had never seen my students as enlivened as they were by the debate. I encouraged all students to speak and so each point was presented by a different student, as were the rebuttals. The students flipped through their books desperately looking for quotations during the planning session; suddenly evidence from the text was no longer merely a synopsis of the plot but was instead consistently a close analysis of language. Each team actively tried to win by incorporating well historicized close readings into everything they presented.

The debates were a resounding success. All students participated, and discussion consistently incorporated close textual analysis with larger over-views of the plot and historical evidence. I never announced the question to be debated until I arrived at class, so students always had to think quickly and demonstrate familiarity and comfort with the work; students were no longer able to prepare what they intended to say ahead of time. My questions were always closely aligned with the classical and biblical theme of the course: Sometimes I asked ‘Does the work more closely align with the old or new testament?’ or I asked ‘Is redemption possible in the novel?’ or ‘Does the work meet the classical definition of a tragedy?’ students were never allowed to choose which side to affirm, so they had to be able to argue well and find evidence to support whatever view they were assigned. The students remained consistently engaged and excited about class; many sent me positive feedback via email or came up to me after class with positive reactions to the seminar format. All the students that chose to give their opinion of the efficacy of the debates on the end-of-term course reviews circulated by King’s emphasized that this innovation in the seminar structure encouraged their engagement with the text, precisely meeting my goal.

This supported the aim of the module, to teach students how to recognize, describe, and assess the range of significances endowed in the classical and biblical contexts of English literary work. The debates drew upon Lillis’ observation that students’ academic writing (and thus performance on their exams) might be improved by providing students with ‘talkback’ rather than ‘feedback’ (2003). Lillis explains that:

‘One relatively simple way of involving students in decisions about the kinds of meanings they might wish to make in their academic writing, and thus a shift towards a more dialogic approach, is to reconceptualise the widespread practice of “feedback” as “talkback”. “Feedback” typically has the following features: a focus on the student’s
written text as a product, a tendency towards closed commentary, including evaluative language such as “good”, weak, etc. Talkback, in contrast, would involve focusing on the student’s text in process, an acknowledgement of the partial nature of any text and hence the range of potential meanings...’ (2003, p.204)

The exam-based assessment for this course made Lillis’ ‘talkback’ unfeasible as a response to the student’s actual writing in ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts’. However, my ability as an instructor to react to arguments made during the debates and award points when quotations were used effectively (and not to when they were misused, irrelevant, or the relevance was not sufficiently explained) allowed students to receive feedback on the type of close reading and argumentation they would be expected to produce in response to essay prompts on the exam.1

The introduction of the debates to the seminars for ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts for English’ aligned the seminar structure with the ultimate assessment for the course. The debates mimicked the structure of a well thought out answer on an end-of-term exam; like the essays students are expected to write, each side of the debate was expected to produce three well evidenced and cogent points defending their perspective based on evidence from the text, alongside a dynamic introduction and a conclusion which not only supported their perspective but which also addressed and negated evidence introduced by the opposition. Undergraduates are very concerned about how to prepare for examinations; students participated much more actively and enthusiastically in all the assignments I introduced after I explained the relevance of the activity to the assessment. The requirement that students use text to support their perspective familiarized them with the type of close-reading based critical analysis that is expected of students in their first year of the English course at King’s College London. Because all students were required to participate in each debate their learning experience changed according to the domains described by Bloom (1956) and later refined by Orlich et al. (2012); instead of a solely cognitive experience (listening to presentation in the seminars and lectures), students also engaged with materials using affective learning (as they must actively engage with texts to strategize their use in an argument) and a psychomotor process (as they work with a peer group to structure and present their assigned perspective effectively). Thus with this revision of teaching-practice in the ‘Classical and Biblical’ seminars the module provided students with what Bloom calls a ‘holistic’ experience, helping them not only absorb isolated facts and critical readings, but also to structure and express interpretations based in a close reading of the text and an understanding of the works’ contexts (1956).2 This approach also helps provide all students, regardless of their familiarity

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1 Lillis is ultimately in favour of allowing students to use their own cultural context to inform their academic argumentation, something which is discouraged in ‘Classical and Biblical Contexts’ (students’ personal responses to particularly biblical texts can stand in the way of their use of the text itself as a context to explicate further meaning in a work of English literature). However, through the use of the debates it is possible to create a classroom scenario which provides a context for the close reading that is expected in students’ essays on their end-of-term exam.

2 Also see: Hauenstein, 1998.
with either the primary English texts or the classical and biblical sources, the opportunity to gain the important skill of argumentation.

Students were encouraged to reflect upon their own progress engaging and understanding both critical ideas and how to use evidence from the texts to support their readings in every class by the scores awarded at the end of the debates. The one-to-one scoring system (described above) helped establish student comfort with close reading and offering their own interpretations of text alongside contextual facts. In this way the module uses ‘formative assessment and feedback ...to empower students [to become] self-regulated learners’, helping them to track their progress over the course of the term (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 199). As the seminar leader, I was able to interact with students as each team structured its argument, yet the scoring system remained the primary benchmarks influencing students as they formulated their debate-plans. Paul A. Kirschner, John Sweller, and Richard Clark found that ‘minimal guidance during instruction is significantly less effective and efficient than guidance specifically designed to support the cognitive processing necessary for learning’ (2006, p. 76). This is confirmed by my experience as the debate structure seemed to increase the students confidence in their own interpretations while organically provides close guidance as to the type of essay structure and close textual analysis that will be appropriate to the final assessment of the module.

The introduction of debates substantially improved the quality of the class. However, I am not the only educational theorist to wrestle with how to bring greater interpretation into the seminars, particularly interpretation based in the text itself; I hope to incorporate some new techniques into my seminars next year to keep students engaged with the class. In particular, I will experiment with a technique described by Elisabeth Anne Leonard (1997) describes:

‘Give a specific assignment: “Interpret So-and-so by transforming the form of his or her words to reveal your own reading of them” (play) and a companion assignment: “Explain why you made the choices you did, how you read the passage, and how your transformation shows that” (work). Such a dual assignment would push students to think about the nature of interpretation and voice, require close reading (both of other and self), and allow those students who think they aren’t creative to be so—because they would be working with someone else’s words, they wouldn’t throw up the barriers of limiting ideas of “poetic” language.’ (p. 229)

Leonard’s idea has several elements which my debate-technique lacks. Students have room to work creatively as well as critically with the text (making their experience in my seminar broader). Furthermore, while students are tacitly encouraged by my debates to engage with the text at every level in order to gain points for their team, this creative process will force the students to consider issues of voice, diction, and rhythm as they reform what is in front of them. By combining poetics with argumentation the students will be placed in a position that fosters their empathy for the author of the work, further nuancing their understanding of the importance of context. Ultimately I favour the debates as an approach over Leonard’s poetic argumentation because the three-point structure and thorough argumentation encouraged by the activity mirrors the courses assessment and constitutes an important transferable skill. In
the future I will use Leonard’s technique, particularly in courses that are less context-driven than ‘Classical and Biblical’, to keep my seminars from seeming repetitive, but my primary seminar structure will still remain the debates-based.

My goal with this course was to encourage students to apply their growing historical and contextual knowledge of literature to produce insightful and accurate close readings. I struggled with how to accomplish this, leading me to incorporate research-led teaching into my method. Ultimately I was able to highlight the transferable skills inherent in close reading by encouraging students to debate, drawing upon their familiarity with the literature as well as its contexts to produce well reasoned and analytical critical arguments. The students found the debate-structure engaging and in fact enlivening. I was impressed by their knowledge and ability to perform quick research in order to support their assigned perspectives. The debates proved an excellent means by which to encourage students’ comfort with close reading in discussions; their success highlights the need for the English department to move away from the assumption that students’ enter university with an understanding of how to participate in scholarly discussion in the classroom. As the university grows the School of Arts and Humanities should consider introducing a means by which to teach close reading and other important writing skills to first year students, whether through this debate structure or some other focused means before the student proceeds further in their degree. Ultimately I was able to lead dynamic seminars that closely reflected the pedagogy of university-level English literature. This helped my first-years to make the transition from good studentship to good scholarship.

References


The global, the *louco*, and the classroom: Learning from interdisciplinary teaching

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**Introduction**

In Portuguese, the word *louco* means ‘crazy.’ It is identical in almost every way to *loco*, its Spanish equivalent. It can be used as a noun or an adjective, and much like in English, it can take many forms in common vernacular. For example, to describe something as ‘louco/crazy’ could mean that it was wild, fun, dangerous, or fantastic. Or it could be used as a title – the lunatic, the madwoman, the calamitous – in order to identify a particular individual. It can also imply absurdity, like how it might be ‘louco/crazy’ to distinguish local from global, or spatial from social, or verbal irony from Socratic irony, and so on. But here I digress; this essay is meant to reflect upon the ‘craziness’ of teaching globalization, and in that direction I now proceed.

In August 2011, I began my current academic appointment at King’s College London. I am a lecturer in the King’s Brazil Institute, and just as I am new to the job and British academia, so too is the Brazil Institute new to King’s. Though the Institute was originally launched in 2008, regular classes did not begin until autumn of 2011. Our focus is upon interdisciplinary research and graduate teaching, and, in addition to advising PhD students, we offer a taught MA program entitled ‘Brazil in Global Perspective.’ Establishing a new, autonomous institute is never easy, and particularly when the title and focus of that institute are also brand new – ie, ‘Brazilian Studies’ – it can be a struggle to find one’s way in the entrenched, disciplinary culture of contemporary academia. In addition to new beginnings and a host of new modules, our first year provided plenty of ‘louco’ moments.

As someone with a MA and PhD in Geography, however, I found the interdisciplinary adaptation process both exciting and dynamic. To be sure, many geographers come from diverse academic backgrounds (I, for example, have a BA in Anthropology and a PhD minor in Latin American Studies), and working with researchers from across the social sciences, physical sciences, and humanities has proven quite insightful for geographic research (eg, Jazeel, 2005; Marston et al., 2007; Kingsbury and Jones, 2009). Moreover, numerous geographers engage with scholarly works outside the discipline in their research (Painter, 2006; Secor, 2007; Peet et al., 2011), and applied geographers, for years, have shown to be among the most versatile in their fields. As a method for framing emergent

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1 Excerpts from this article were included as part of an op-ed letter published in the September issue of the *Association of American Geographers Newsletter* and are re-printed here with permission (please see Garmany, 2012).
questions analytically, and as a way to create more innovative and robust research designs, interdisciplinary approaches offer immense potential for social science work and research findings.

Teaching from an interdisciplinary perspective, on the other hand, is perhaps not so easy. Particularly when teaching at the graduate level. But why should this be? Are MA students not ideal candidates for interdisciplinary learning, far less encumbered by the old debates and rigid ways of thinking that weigh heavy upon discipline-specific traditions? Before I arrived at the Brazil Institute, I was convinced that yes, a brand new, interdisciplinary MA program offered limitless teaching opportunities with less of the baggage that tends to hamper more established disciplinary approaches. After a full academic year of teaching, however, I would describe my feelings as much more cautiously optimistic. As I now appreciate, to explain and understand a given piece of academic insight, it helps to know the history of that academic debate. And to understand that history, we often draw reference from disciplinary pillars. In short, perhaps one must first be ‘disciplined’ before they can be ‘interdisciplined.’ Then again, perhaps the problem lies more in old methods of teaching than it does in new processes of learning.

The purpose of this essay is to investigate these very questions through the lens of a case study analysis. In order to more critically examine interdisciplinary graduate training, I draw upon my own teaching experience from a module entitled ‘Globalisation, Development, and Brazil.’ I was the one who designed this module, and I taught it for the first time in the autumn of 2011. By reflecting upon my teaching practices and interactions with students, as well as student evaluation forms submitted at the end of the semester, I consider the challenges of teaching graduate students in an interdisciplinary context, and how the King’s graduate experience can both help and hinder in this process.

I begin with a brief review of the literature surrounding this topic, examining, in particular, accounts related to interdisciplinary teaching and learning in the social sciences. Also important to this debate are pedagogies of graduate education along with student engagements with globalization. I then move on to provide some general background on the module, the students involved, and the teaching strategies I employed. Following that, I offer a critical analysis of the module experience where, through multiple angles, I attempt to locate both the positive and negative features in my teaching practice. And finally, in the last section of this essay, I reflect upon lessons learned and the possibilities – and opportunities – that exist for a more effective graduate teaching and learning experience. Indeed, just as it can be ‘louco’ to separate ‘the global’ and ‘the local’ in studies of globalization, so too, perhaps, is it equally troublesome to isolate teaching from learning in modules designed for graduate students.

**Teaching to think / thinking to teach: pedagogies of graduate education**


‘that favor a disarticulated technical training over courses in critical theory, which would enable students to make linkages with other bodies of knowledge so as to gain a more comprehensive understanding of reality, points to the very ideology that attempts
to deny its existence through a false claim of neutrality. The insidious nature of ideology is its ability to make itself invisible.’

Drawing from Paulo Freire, a renowned yet also controversial figure in theories of pedagogy (eg, Freire, 1974, 2000), Macedo highlights both the reflective and confessionary moments that accompany the teaching process. As Freire insisted, students are subjects to be engaged rather than objects to be taught, and as such, educators must challenge their own (often fixed) assumptions just as thoroughly as they challenge their students. In other words, as Macedo indicates, ‘the facts’ to do not simply speak for themselves in teaching: certain individuals select the topics that are to be presented, choose the order in which they are arranged, and decide which topics are to be excluded from the curriculum. To insist upon the neutrality of a given course design is absurd; and to not involve students in such debates insults their intelligence. Without critical reflection from teachers and students, the act of teaching can, in fact, be very unjust to the entire process of education and learning.

Just as his critics have argued the untenability of Freire’s ‘critical consciousness’ in teaching, so too have his supporters debated the most effective ways to employ his ideas in the classroom. Though numerous Freirian methodologies exist, perhaps Stanley Aronowitz (1998) provides the most rational approach when he suggests that Freire’s ideas are not formulaic – a cookbook recipe to be followed nomothetically – but rather a set of ideas to be explored and wrestled with over time. Judith Gardiner (2003) provides a fascinating, multi-year account of this perspective, describing her experience as a junior faculty member in a newly established, interdisciplinary department. Some of her most insightful moments came from engagements with graduate students who felt both emboldened and empowered by the non-hierarchical structure of teacher/student interactions. Nevertheless, as Gardiner goes on to explain, this approach is not without its problems, and in addition to ambiguities that sometimes arise within student/mentor relationships, certain basic skills and learning outcomes can also be overlooked. In a sense, Gardiner surmises, a ‘critical curriculum’ should not necessarily mean that all learning outcomes are unguided.

George Braine (2002) expands upon this observation, noting specifically the difficulties that often confront non-native graduate students. Highly relevant to universities like King’s, Braine’s research explores questions of ‘academic literacy’ and the ways non-native students struggle to adapt in foreign graduate programs. While they may pass a standardized language test with relative ease, graduate school in the social sciences requires an especially high level of reading and writing – along with academic and discipline-specific jargon – and non-native students must learn quickly in order to keep up. Moreover, beyond the technical skills of language and writing, cultural differences also pervade, and interactions with mentors and their peers are often tricky for foreign students. Much like Gardiner (2003), Braine (2002) notes how learning outcomes are not always clearly defined in North American and British graduate programs, and non-native students often struggle to decipher the criteria upon which they will be assessed. Quite often, he argues, non-native students have a clear sense of focus in their course of study, and their desire to learn ‘employable’ skills does not always match with their understanding of ‘critical consciousness.’ In order to balance this – eg, Freirian learning goals (autonomy, empowerment, communication) with student and university professional
objectives – Carolyn Dickie and Jay Leighton (2010) suggest that self-directed, problem-based learning can be an effective pedagogical tool. And particularly in taught MA programs with interdisciplinary foci (eg, Brazil in Global Perspective), a clear module structure is useful for linking wide-ranging themes and meeting the expectations of a diverse group of students (Buchan et al., 2007). Indeed, while not without its difficulties, Dickie and Leighton (2010) highlight the ways that interdisciplinary approaches provide a flexible, dynamic lens for broad-based graduate research and learning.

Interdisciplinary graduate teaching

According to Spelt et al. (2009, p. 366), interdisciplinary learning is valuable for developing ‘boundary-crossing skills’ that emphasize ‘the ability to change perspectives, to synthesize knowledge of different disciplines, and to cope with complexity.’ Though certainly not new to academia, interdisciplinarity contributes to both research and teaching in ways still to be understood. Martin Davies and Marcia Devlin (2007) explore these possibilities, suggesting that an advantage to interdisciplinary approaches is that they tend to focus more explicitly upon contemporary, problem-based teaching and research (Klein, 1996; Bradbeer, 1999). Like most scholars, however, Davies and Marcia presume that interdisciplinarity begins with some basic, discipline-based principles; what they overlook is that many newly created MA programs (eg, the Global Institutes at King’s) do not emerge from a common disciplinary background. In fact, not only do such taught MA programs combine multiple disciplines within the social sciences, but they also frequently intermix humanities and cultural studies as well. In this case, not only is it problematic to decide the structure and learning outcomes of the program, it can be difficult to determine where the MA course should even begin.

Helpful in this respect is the work of Manathunga et al. (2006, p. 369), who suggest that interdisciplinary teaching at the graduate level can be made more effective by following four basic principles: 1) there must be space for interdisciplinary dialogue; 2) engage students with texts and tools from a number of different disciplines; 3) synthesize multiple knowledges to produce new, creative ideas, and; 4) create individual, partnered, and group contexts for interdisciplinary exchange. Rather than working from a basic set of discipline-based ideas, the authors argue that by encouraging students to confront multiple (and often conflicting) epistemologies, learning can take place in a more applied, contextualized fashion. In this way, they posit, interdisciplinary courses “expose students to multiple, sometimes conflicting perspectives and encourage them to actively construct and apply knowledge” (2006, p. 369). And to unravel topics such as globalization, which are abundantly interdisciplinary in nature, such an approach is both highly adaptable and potentially broad in source material (Brainard, 2002).

To work towards what Manathunga et al. (2006) suggest – particularly with respect to their third basic principle (ie, synthesizing multiple knowledges) – tutors need also to reflect critically upon their own research and teaching methods. As Ron Griffiths (2004) indicates, what can be most stymieing to interdisciplinary learning objectives are discipline-based research methods that, rather than responding to imminent questions and/or practical problems, seek further entrenchment in disciplinary debates. Very often in the social sciences, researchers focus upon adding to interdisciplinary bodies of literature instead of
drawing from existing contributions. More bluntly, scholars regularly stress the ways that their own disciplinary approaches can strengthen other literatures, and do not query how multidisciplinary findings and collaborations might actually contribute to their own fields. As such, it can be challenging to facilitate interdisciplinary learning, as not only are multi-epistemological research examples difficult to locate, but particularly at research-intensive universities, few tutors are genuinely committed to interdisciplinary research. Remembering that Manathunga et al. (2006) stress the importance of reflexivity in graduate teaching, tutors hoping to encourage interdisciplinary learning should therefore remain equally active and committed in their engagement with multidisciplinary models of research.

Teaching globalization
According to Muqtedar Kahn (2003), globalization is a topic that, at least in the classroom, demands an interdisciplinary approach. As he points out, globalization is understood very differently from contrasting disciplinary perspectives (eg, historians may view it as a time-based process whereas economists may see it as a market-driven one), and therefore to understand it – and especially to teach it – one should proceed from an interdisciplinary perspective. To best accomplish this, Kahn offers the three ‘Ps’ of globalization: it is a phenomenon, a philosophy, and a process. By presenting the topic to students using these foundations, and drawing from a wide variety of sources from multiple disciplines, Kahn suggests that students should be better prepared to understand globalization as a nuanced, ongoing moment with multiple points of view (see also Mansilla and Gardner, 2007).

Moreover, as Pasi Sahlberg (2004) argues, such diverse perspectives work to reduce the economic hegemony of globalization, helping students to engage with broader debates independent from (overly) simplistic commodity chain examples.

Related to this are decisively critical perspectives on globalization, and teaching methods that serve to position the lecturer and students in contemporary debates over hotly contested processes (eg, Hardt and Negri, 2000; Smith, 2005). Writes Paul McLaren (2005), too many educators shy away from critiques of globalization for fear of breeching ‘neutrality’ or ‘objectivity’ in their teaching. In conversation with a host of recent works (eg, Lingard, 2006; Warnecke, 2009), McLaren asserts that researchers and educators who fail to recognize and acknowledge the ideological nature of their own work do very little to help their students develop critical tools for understanding globalization and other social phenomena. And much like Macedo (1998) observes – drawing from Freire – claims of neutrality highlight ideology at its barest moment: globalization, perhaps, cannot simply be studied ‘objectively’ in the classroom. Difficult as it may be, to understand and to teach globalization to graduate students, a carefully structured yet staunchly critical, interdisciplinary approach is required. The classroom is one that necessitates openness and dynamism. Returning once more to Freire (1998, p. 114):

‘Globalization theory, which speaks of ethics, hides the fact that its ethics are those of the marketplace and not the universal ethics of the human person. It is for these matters that we ought to struggle courageously if we have, in truth, made a choice for a humanized world.’
Globalization, the module, and the teaching methods

Working from Freire’s pedagogical standpoint, and trying to employ insights from the literature on teaching globalization to graduate students, I developed and taught for the first time a module entitled ‘Brazil and Globalisation’ during the autumn semester of 2011. The aim of this module was to untangle the processes by which globalization both links and distances people, places, and events, and to analyze critical viewpoints concerning uneven development, power relations, and socio-cultural change in contemporary Brazil. In developing the module, I chose to divide the course into three major sections: the first four weeks provided some general background on scholarly understandings of globalization and grounded those debates in Brazilian historical examples; the next three weeks explored political economic contributions to globalization and I began to introduce some of my own research on urban and political development in Brazil; and finally, in the last three weeks, I attempted to bridge the major topics of the module through discussions of socio-cultural change, offering feminist and postcolonial critiques of both Marxist and neoliberal understandings of globalization. Students were responsible for roughly 100 pages of reading each week (often drawn from four to five different sources), and assessment was based upon two essays written over the course of the semester.

In an attempt to draw upon Freire in my teaching, I began each class by having the students encircle their chairs/desks so that everyone was facing one another. I often changed my seating position over the course of the semester so that I was able to sit next to everyone in the class, and also to decenter the front of the classroom. I would begin each class session by making some general announcements, asking for questions related to the essays or other topics, and then provide some background on the readings, the theoretical debates of that week, and some global historical perspective. This introduction would normally last 30-45 minutes, and afterward I turned the discussion over to student discussion leaders. During the first week of class I asked the students to select one week that they would like to lead discussion, and using their choices I put them into groups of two or three. I would correspond with them the week leading up to their discussion leadership, helping them to organize their thoughts and discussion questions, and during the second half of class they would summarize the key topics from the readings and pose questions for debate to their colleagues. It was my goal during this second hour of class to intervene as little as possible, and my hope was that students would engage one another – and me – in a series of mini debates.

For me, one of the most compelling features of this module was the makeup of the student cohort. There were twenty students enrolled in the module (along with some PhD students who audited the course), and they came from a wide array of different countries. Additionally, they represented several different departments on campus, with, perhaps, a small majority coming from Geography or International Political Economy. What more could a module on globalization ask for than to meet in central London with twenty students from twelve different countries with a diverse set of academic interests? (And curiously, not one of them from Brazil.) My hope was that the students would share their experiences and different perspectives, challenge each other (and me) in unpredictable ways, and learn firsthand the complexities of globalization from one another. Nearly everyone was in their early to mid twenties, and there was a fairly equal balance of women and men. From the outset, I imagined that classroom dynamics were on my side.
Mutual adaptations: lessons from the module

The first day of class, like most first days of the school year, was an exciting, anxious experience. For me, this was the first module I had ever taught at King's; and for that matter, it was my first time in a British classroom. Nervous as I was, I reminded myself that the experience was entirely new for the students as well: unlike in the United States, where graduate courses intermix first-year MA students with second-year MA students and PhD students, MA programs at King's are normally one-year affairs. For nearly all MA students at King's, the beginning of the semester is their first time in a graduate classroom. No one in my classroom – myself included – had any sense for the general habitus of a graduate module at King's. This provided me immense flexibility in terms of shaping classroom culture, yet it also meant that I had very little (known) platform upon which to build. The students, to their credit, seemed happy to accommodate my teaching style, and very quickly the module took on the sort of rhythm I had hoped for.

In retrospect, my frustrations with the module were often the result of my own ignorance and misguided expectations regarding graduate education at King's.

To begin, class discussions rarely produced the sorts of analytic debates I had hoped for. Remembering my own graduate experience, PhD students were most often the ones who pushed major theoretical debates in class, and I should have considered this when planning the module. In all fairness, first-semester MA students should not be expected to perform at the same level as those who have been in graduate school for several years. And without senior graduate students in class to enculturate them as such, the MA students in my classroom had no framework upon which to model their practice. Related to this, I believe, many students were reluctant to share their ideas or critique the class readings. During informal conversations with students at the end of the semester, I learned that many of them felt unqualified to critique the authors we had read, and they felt that their ideas were not worth sharing because they were not experts in the subject matter. These attitudes, while understandable, were stifling to in-class discussions, and I struggled often to make the second hour of each class productive. Moreover, I later came to understand that many students were reticent to participate in class because they were uncomfortable with their English language skills (ie, foreign students) and/or because they said that in their academic experience, lecturers were supposed to speak and students were meant to listen. More bluntly, some felt that an MA program should be lecture intensive, and thus they would learn (and presumably absorb) what they needed from in-class lectures.

Though I now feel like I should have anticipated such issues more directly, I am confident that in future semesters I will be able to strengthen the module based on these lessons. Before explaining how I intend to do this, however, I begin by reflecting on some issues that I am less willing to accommodate. To start with, I was astonished by how frequently students missed class. Worried that it was through some fault of my own, I later found in conversation with colleagues at King's that MA students rarely attend all of their classes each semester. This is something I am unwilling to accept, and I intend to adapt the Module Approval Form to include attendance as part of the overall assessment. I was also surprised by how unwilling many students were to buy class readings – why spend £15,000 on tuition and then balk at paying £50 for the most important materials of the course? – but this, I think, is something I can do very little to change. In the future I intend to email all registered students before the semester begins in order to distribute the reading list, and I will also post more readings to
KEATS in an effort to keep materials costs as low as possible. I could also do more to ensure ample library resources, but as I found from the module evaluation forms, students were unhappy with library materials in all of their modules.

Judging by the module evaluation forms that students filled in at the end of the semester, nearly everyone appreciated the collegial atmosphere of the classroom. Students generally liked the open discussion format, and many commented that they enjoyed the class and the lecturer. Perhaps most importantly, most felt that they had learned quite a lot from the module. Many students remarked that the tutorials were not an especially good use of time, and already, for next autumn, I have cancelled tutorials for this module. Likewise they were underwhelmed with library resources, and as such I intend to make even more resources available online in upcoming semesters. More confounding, however, was that many students commented that they liked the idea of student-led discussion during the second hour of class, yet they were unhappy with the quality of leadership provided by most of their peers. There are several ways I can think of to address this: for example, I intend to meet with discussion leaders immediately before class in semesters to come in order to help focus their questions and summarizing comments. Additionally, despite the fact that many students liked the open discussions, many also wrote that they would appreciate even more lecture from me during the first hour of class. Balancing these two teaching strategies will remain an ongoing challenge for me in years to come, and the course readings I select, the students who enroll in the class, and my own evolving research interests will likely play important roles as well.

Reflecting on the literature, there are several lessons to be learned from scholars of graduate pedagogy, interdisciplinary approaches, and teaching globalization. Like Kahn (2003), Sahlberg (2004), and McLaren (2005) suggest, I created a reading list for this module that drew upon several interpretations of globalization and also provided multiple epistemological critiques (e.g., Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, post-development). Perhaps the most troublesome issue for me was the rapidity with which the semester passed, and with only ten class periods to work with, we rarely had time to explore different understandings of globalization in any depth. In the future I may need to reduce the total number of perspectives and focus upon those I feel are most useful for critical thinking. Drawing from Gardiner (2003), I could also create more concise, clearly focused learning outcomes, and I think it could be useful to clarify those objectives at the beginning of each class period. This, I believe, might also allay some of the anxieties felt by non-native students (e.g., Braine, 2002) by making explicit the purpose of each reading and the goals of class discussion. Responding to the module evaluation feedback provided by students, I could also introduce more ‘Brazil-specific’ material and, like Spelt et al. (2009) and Davies and Devlin (2007) propose, ground such readings in contemporary, emergent debates of global change and development. Then, in class, I could provide time for small group debate – something I rarely did during the autumn semester of 2011 – and encourage students to engage with one another more frequently (and less formally) than the singular time when they lead class discussion (e.g., Manathunga et al., 2006).

Thinking ahead, I feel one of the best ways to improve this module would be to strengthen the features that are most important, and to reinforce the topics and lessons that I most want the students to carry with them once the module is over. For example, I believe it is important for
the students to learn critical thinking skills, and to analyze processes such as development and globalization with both skepticism and imagination. To achieve this, I am not sure that I need a greater variety of readings, but rather greater depth in key areas. To me, the particularities of what students learn is less important than methods and processes they develop for learning; I would rather that students learn to think critically than remember some basic information they learned during their MA course. Drawing from what I found in the module assessment criteria (eg, two essays), the students are poised to make original contributions to a whole series of debates, but their skills and thought processes need refining and polish. For example, they ask interesting questions about the world and identify overlooked issues, but they need work when it comes to synthesizing existing research and proposing new ideas. In this respect, many of the students could improve their writing skills, not just for technical or grammatical excellence, but also for expressing and articulating their ideas. This is something I will continue to address in future semesters, and judging by the module evaluation feedback forms, students tend to appreciate this sort of training and advice.

Just as conceptions of ‘the global’ remain immanently linked to understandings of ‘the local,’ so too is this module on globalization likely to flirt with ‘the louco’ for years to come. Dynamism, in many respects, often necessitates alternative ideas and new approaches. For me, this makes it all the more interesting, and by adapting to lessons learned across each semester, I hope to make productive the ‘crazy’ couplings of Freirian pedagogies with structured, definitive learning objectives.

Conclusions
Throughout this essay I have endeavoured to provide a reflective and nuanced account of my teaching and classroom experience. By drawing from a case study of an individual module, I considered my own teaching practices alongside a concise body of academic literature on pedagogy, interdisciplinarity, and globalization. Though the diversity of students was, on the one hand, one of the greatest strengths of this class, it was also one of the most complicated variables to negotiate. I feel much more prepared for this sort of diversity in the future, and better able to capitalize on its potential than to dwell upon its limitations. Additionally, I found that students appreciated my own research findings and observations, and searching for new ways to weave these elements into the module could certainly help to improve it. Cultivating better in-class discussions will likely be something I struggle with for the rest of my career, but perhaps getting students to work in small groups during the beginning of class could help to facilitate this. That way they will engage with one another, become accustomed to speaking and interacting from the beginning of class (rather than listening to me lecture through the entire first hour), and learn critical thinking skills through personal interaction with their peers. Already I have developed several new ideas for the autumn semester of 2012, and indeed, I would be greatly surprised if I do not continue to make significant adjustments to this module over the next several years.

Issues of globalization in both teaching and research are likely to increase in popularity and critical urgency in years to come. Moreover, as much as any topic of academic inquiry, perspectives on globalization are incredibly ‘interdisciplinary.’ Yet teasing out these concepts with students, whether in a King’s Global Institutes classroom or any other, is not always so
easy. In my own case, two factors I imagined to be advantageous (eg, international student
diversity and a hyper-globalized setting) instead proved difficult, for me, to harness effectively.
Connected to this, I found that asking students to un-tether discipline-based understandings
of globalization was much more challenging than I had anticipated. And the lesson, perhaps,
is one not wasted solely on teaching: it applies evenly to academic research and departmental
collaboration efforts. Just as most tutors can still learn from interdisciplinary approaches,
contributors to such bodies of research also stand to gain by drawing from interdisciplinary
scholarship rather than merely adding to it. As a developing topic for academic research and
teaching, globalization is a subject area greatly strengthened by interdisciplinary perspectives.
And as academic tutors continue to incorporate these approaches, new teaching and learning
strategies should help to produce exciting and dynamic classroom possibilities. All jest aside –
and as I discovered firsthand – the louco of globalization studies resides in the lack of engaged,
multi-way communication that so often persists.

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and Littlefield.


Educating beyond *hysteresis*: fostering inquiry-based learning in postgraduate Middle Eastern Studies

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**Introduction**

Nearly a century of political upheaval and authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa, punctuated by European colonialism, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of new dictatorships, raises important questions about the teaching of Middle Eastern Studies at postgraduate level. How do we teach to foster learning that might make even the smallest impact on the political emancipation of people in the region? This evaluation of my practice over my first year of masters-level teaching is animated by this reflexive political interest, as well as an interest in recent discussions in the literature of inquiry-based learning and the teaching-research nexus. Inquiry-based learning is question- or problem-driven, constructs new knowledge, involves learning by doing, is student-centred, and is designed to move students towards self-directed learning (Sproken-Smith and Walker, 2010). The taught MA seminar is a unique lens through which to explore this. Students in an MA seminar have a higher capacity for self-guided research than undergraduates, and therefore while they require some ‘scaffolding’ (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1986) in the form of ‘guided inquiry’, (inquiry-led) they also have a very high capacity for conducting research and engaging in open inquiry (Staver and Bay, 1987). They have significant capacity for contributing to new knowledge, what Levy calls ‘discovery-based learning’ (Levy, 2009). Therefore, educating MA students is ripe for a ‘research-based’ approach to learning (Healy and Jenkins, 2009). Further, how might a research-based approach create a crucible for creative thinking on the contemporary challenges of the Middle East and North Africa?

I became interested in how the MA seminar could be better oriented towards these ends and what opportunities are presented by the seminar structure for collaborative discovery-based learning. In evaluating my own practice I was interested in how four main themes related to inquiry-based learning in my MA seminars: expertise and authority, educating for policy engagement, reflexivity and critical thinking, and collaboration. Following this general line of discussion in the literature, I asked three main questions in relation to my own practice: To what extent have my MA seminars over the past year adopted an inquiry-led approach? How could my MA seminars be better designed to enhance the student experience through fostering critical thinking, student-driven inquiry and a research-based approach? What should be the broader goals for educating MA students in Middle Eastern Studies, and how might educating for open inquiry indicate a move towards these goals?

**Background context**

The sample for this paper involved 22 MA students in two seminars for two different MA modules, one offered in the autumn 2011 and the other offered in spring 2012. The two
courses in the sample were optional modules: the *U.S. in the Middle East since 1945* and *Revolution, Ideology and Civil War*. Some students surveyed were enrolled in both modules. All modules are taught in a one hour lecture, followed by one hour seminar format. They are graded by one 5,000 word essay at the end and have one, ungraded seminar presentation. These seminars were 12-15 students each. Students were asked to give a 5-8 minute presentation before opening up discussion to the group. Students were asked to choose from a list of 14 questions (guided inquiry), to conduct primary and secondary research, to present following the relevant lecture, and to raise further questions for discussion (open inquiry).

For the purposes of this paper, 22 students were polled about their perceptions of seminars as a collaborative, research-led environment, to ascertain to what extent students already saw their seminars as an opportunity for individual and group research and how they would respond to further collaboration. In the survey they were asked to think broadly about the role of research and inquiry in the classroom as well as more narrowly about their particular experiences in the past year. The response rate was relatively low (7 out of 22, 32 per cent) and therefore is not representative. However, the individual responses are illuminating in their own right. These responses were also triangulated with the course evaluations (17) from the spring 2012 course, teaching observations by my tutor and a department colleague, and my own reflections recorded over the course of the year. The issues addressed below are data-driven rather than deductive.

It must be noted that although these two modules were designed to stimulate an inquiry-led approach as far as possible, including in the seminar, this was not explicitly stated as one of the learning outcomes for the course. With this in mind, to what extent did students perceive themselves as engaging in research-based learning? The majority of respondents (6/7) indicated that they had regularly engaged with primary sources in preparation for seminars. Media sources were the most oft-cited (5/7) with policy reports from think tanks and political speeches a close second (2/7). One student also mentioned going directly to the websites

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1 All the MA students were enrolled either on a taught MA in Middle East and Mediterranean Studies or the MA in Conflict Resolution in Divided Societies.
2 Students were asked five survey questions: While you were preparing your seminar presentation did you use any primary sources? Did the research you did for class (presenting and writing your essay) feel like a collaborative effort with your peers and tutor, an individual effort, or something in between? When you were presenting, did you feel like an ‘expert in the room’ on your topic? How would you like to conduct research collaboratively in class and communicate it to your peers (seminar presentation, class wiki, blog, short film, etc.)? Did the seminar discussions raise new questions for you and prompt you to go off and try to find the answers, outside of what was expected in class? How would you have liked to share this with your class? The questions were chosen to explore intersubjectivity and group learning as well as the individual’s perceptions of their own creative engagement with primary sources.
3 There were 17 course evaluations, with questions set by the department. Students were evenly split between finding that the module stimulated their interest in the subject ‘moderately’ and ‘very much’.
of Middle Eastern state and non-state actors. However, only three students articulated a broad conception of the role of research in the classroom: one noted that lectures were ‘well-researched’, another noted that the lectures need to be ‘less based off the lecturer’s research’ and another noted that the use of primary sources, particularly as visual aids (‘Youtube videos, speeches’) would have made the material come alive. This suggests the need to make this approach explicit, and to integrate it so that it becomes part of the habitus of the MA seminar.

Expertise and authority
The briefest of viewings of the nightly news would make clear to the lay reader that who counts as an ‘expert’ on the Middle East, whose opinions will be listened to by policymakers and the wider public alike, is a live and ongoing issue. Arguably, in the classroom we are creating the next generations of experts on these issues. A research-based approach – in which students are encouraged to take the lead and to engage in both knowledge discovery and knowledge creation after appropriate scaffolding (Levy, 2009) raises important questions as to how to best foster student confidence and a ‘culture of expertise’ during seminars. Who is an expert in the classroom? The lecturer? The students? As student presenters engaged with primary and secondary sources on their given research question for the weekly seminar, they were developing a level of expertise about and specialization in a particular subject. They then brought this into the classroom to share back with other seminar participants, both students and tutor. Often students were accessing primary sources that no one else in the room had read. This clearly would seem to be a mark of expertise, of deep knowledge, but was not always understood by students as such.

When asked in retrospect, students were split evenly as to whether they felt like ‘an expert in the room’ while giving seminar presentations. (In hindsight, students may have felt confined by the wording of the question I asked them. I could have worded it more openly to suggest that everyone may have expertise on a given issue, by virtue of being able to mount a critique.) Some felt very confident presenting and engaging with new material, with one student noting that his/her effort in preparation gave him/her confidence. One student noted that they had already adopted an orientation which could be described as open and collaborative: ‘I felt more as though I was giving the others some food for thought in an attempt to open up discussion within the class’. The student did note that he/she felt this way because he/she had never studied the topic before and thus did not feel the right to claim an authoritative voice. Another student felt keenly aware of a gap in expertise between the tutor and students:

‘I couldn’t feel [as though I were an expert in the room], because it is obvious that the tutor of the seminar is the expert in the room. She had already known the stuff you researched and presented. [sic]’

These student remarks raise a number of interesting questions about authority, expertise

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4 Here it is relevant to note that the ability to speak and read Arabic, Farsi and Hebrew is a significant factor in students’ abilities to access primary sources, as it is for scholars in Middle Eastern Studies.
and power in the classroom. What constitutes ‘expertise’ in this particular scenario? How do students and tutors communicate ‘expertise’, linguistically and symbolically, overtly and tacitly, in MA seminars in the social sciences? Is expertise a multipolar commodity, shared among many? (And what does it mean in the politically-charged UK higher education environment to commodify expertise (Barnet and Griffin 1997), both as students who are being graded and as a tutor to fee-paying students?)

Kinchin and Cabot’s work (2012) on expertise is useful for opening up the idea that expertise is something multipolar. It need not be reserved for the presenting student or for the tutor. Kinchin and Cabot have defined ‘the expert student’ as one who ‘recognises the existence and complimentary purposes of different knowledge structures and seeks to integrate them in the application of practice’. Although Kinchin and Cabot focus on clinical settings, this argument is also more broadly applicable in the social sciences. They (2010) have argued that the mark of the expert is the ability to demonstrate the integration of knowledge, through ‘nets of understanding’ (Bradley, Paul and Seeman, 2006) rather than linear ‘chains’. Kinchin, Cabot and Hay (2008) have also developed various methods through which these nets of understandings can be made explicit and represented visually, rather than merely remaining tacit.

If we take Kinchin and Cabot’s work seriously, then it is possible to define ‘expertise’ as the ability to synthesise knowledge, to draw connections between disparate pieces of knowledge, and to apply theory to practice and practice to theory, recursively. This has several powerful implications. First, expertise is an open category, accessible to all. Second, expertise is by and large gained by group activity. The building of ‘nets of understandings’ can be one of the primary goals of the research-led MA seminar. In fact, it would seem to be uniquely suited to this task. Though the student presenter and the tutor may have read more sources about the particular topic, all are able to synthesise material. In fact, sometimes those at several steps removed from the topic can see the connections most clearly or have outside knowledge from practical experience or on other areas that can be brought to bear on the task.

This has important implications for my teaching practice and positionality in the classroom. First, if expertise is multipolar and the building of ‘nets of understanding’ is a collective activity, then students will be bringing primary material into the classroom with which I am not necessarily fully familiar. Rather than this being a burden, this is actually a boon. If teaching and research are mutually informing, this student activity has great potential to (and already has) informed my own research. Second, my modeling of how to develop ‘nets of understanding’ for the course as a whole and on a particular topic is deeply important. Third, in their feedback forms at the end of the course, the most common suggestion by students was to allow more time in the lecture hour for more free-flowing discussion between the students and with the lecturer. This suggests something much broader: that I need to better and more explicitly express my commitment to multipolarity through supporting and empowering students, both in what I say and how I engage in the classroom. It also suggests that the collaborative approach must not merely be confined to the seminar hour but spill over into all aspects of teaching practice.
Collectivity, collaboration and individualism

Solutions to some of the most pressing issues in the Middle East and North Africa region – poverty and intractable conflict – will not be solved by one person alone in a room but by collective effort. This raises important questions about the collaborative nature of research-based MA seminars and the extent to which they can be ‘communities of practice’ (Lea 2005). Roth and Lee (2006) argue that classes are not a de facto community but can become one through socially relevant activity. To what extent did students in these seminars experience their efforts to discover and to produce new knowledge as collective? Students were evenly split as to whether the past year’s coursework felt like more of an individual effort, or a combination of individual and group. As the final assessment is based on one individual essay, this was noted by those who felt that the course overall was more of an individual effort. One suggested, regarding the essay, ‘the other students are too busy with their own papers, therefore we usually do not contribute to each other’s work’ except proofreading. Students noted that seminar presentations, even though they were ultimately individual ‘felt semi-collaborative’ and research-focused. One student noted that s/he felt that his/her fellow students had had little to contribute to his/her ultimate understanding of the course material: ‘While the tutor helped in articulating the general ideas included in the research, peers’ discussions hardly contributed to the final research’ for the student essay. This was not an attitude shared across the board (‘I learned a lot...from the students as well. My classmates taught me a lot...’).

These responses indicate that the MA research seminar is a manifestation of Tönnies’ (2011) Gesellschaft (society) rather than Gemeinschaft (community). Still, some of the students were self-conscious of their ‘discovery-based’ inquiry as intersubjective. Interestingly, these students raised the issues without being prompted to explore intersubjectivity in the classroom. Responding to a question about whether s/he went off to investigate issues raised in the weekly seminar outside the classroom, one student noted:

‘Yes, discussions always bring doubts and curiosity, but I don’t feel confident to share this with everyone in the class, only with the ones I have personal relations with, or some kind of connection. Feeling confident to share ideas is important to develop research and for some people it’s hard to speak to classmates they actually don’t know.’

Another student admitted, when asked if s/he felt like an ‘expert in the room’:

‘I actually believe that on certain topics I shouldn’t have come off as such an “expert,” because it made others in the seminar feel less confident sharing their opinions with me on such a topic.’

Another student, remarking on whether or not he/she continued to explore issues raised outside the classroom noted that he/she did, and said ‘I felt very comfortable in class, therefore whenever I had questions I raised them to the professor and my fellow classmates’.

What are the practical implications for my teaching practice? I am broadly sceptical that it is a tutor’s role to orchestrate Gemeinschaft, or even that this is a reasonable goal for higher
education. However, bearing in mind Boyer’s injunctions (1990), it does seem possible that the one objective for research-based learning is to point towards ‘expansive learning’ where ‘individuals form collectives to deal with problematic situations to capitalize on the greater control they have as a collective’ (Engeström, 1987). At one level, this means providing practical exercises in the seminar to facilitate collaborative engagement with research students are bringing into the class.

**Educating for policy engagement**
Fostering a ‘culture of expertise’ has significant implications both within and beyond the classroom. With very few exceptions, graduates of the two MA programmes in the department will go on to conduct research related to public policy – as policy analysts in governmental, non-governmental and military organisations, as journalists, or as PhD students. In all cases, they will be expected to speak with the authority that comes from holding an MA from King’s in their subject area. Some students begin this kind of work in the MA programme. Others join the MA programme while in the midst of their professional lives as journalists or policy analysts; they hope that a scholarly framework will add additional gravitas and analytical rigour to their policy analysis.

As faculty members of Middle Eastern studies, we routinely engage with governments, the media and policy outlets. Many of our students have similar aspirations, currently mainly channelled primarily through blog-writing. Therefore as faculty members, though our policy engagement, we are engaging in ‘tacit teaching’, as Burbules (2008) puts it: ‘the many forms of informal instruction – some intentional, some unintentional, others difficult to categorise – by which skills, capacities and dispositions are passed along in a domain of practice’. For example, our students observe us engaging with policymakers and the media, particularly through a weekly department ‘Middle East Research Group’ (MERG) seminar with high profile practitioner speakers. I am now more aware of the extent to which the lessons from this practitioner seminar need to be integrated into the research-led seminar classroom. One student noted:

‘In the end everyone is doing something else related to their own lives and the reading and essays are activities that take time, so more activities inside the MA that are not compulsory will be ignored (just check the public for the MERG events).’

There is a clear disconnect between this weekly event and what is seen as an opportunity for tacit teaching, or even ‘the curriculum’ (Fraser and Bosanquet, 2006; Parker 2003; Barnett and Coate 2005). The MERG seminar can be a highly politicized and controversial forum (for example, in March an expert on Syria defended the Assad regime, which is currently committing acts which meet the legal definition of crimes against humanity). However, as a scholar I have been overly cautious in the past year in modelling for my students what scholarly criticism looks like in this public forum and to be overtly, publicly supportive of their own engagement. As a research-led community of scholars we have a duty, *cum* Boyer (1990), to model research-led scholarly critique, the idiom for speaking truth to power, and to support our students when they speak.
This is one example, but it raises important questions about how we are modelling engagement with policy, a research-teaching-policy nexus. This suggests two things. First, it suggests that it is necessary to explicitly model as well as deconstruct what constitutes an ‘authoritative academic voice’. This raises important questions: is there a ‘right’ way to engage in and with policy debate in a public forum? Certainly there are socially constructed mores for engagement, ‘rules of the game’ set by analysts close to the governments and militaries that many of our students (and we as scholars) seek to critique. Several scholars, particularly out of the academic literacies approach (Lea and Street, 1998) have argued that the promotion of reflexivity is critically important. I agree, and engage further in a discussion of reflexivity below. Still, Kamler and Thomson (2006, p. 73), invoking Hyland, and talking about doctoral writing practices, argue persuasively that it is necessary to ‘create a credible persona in the text’. They note (2006, p. 73) that ‘in order to be persuasive and have their argument accepted in their disciplinary communities, doctoral researchers need to build appropriate social relationships with readers’. In this way, postgraduates are ‘connecting to a community of prior scholarship’ (Kalmer and Thomson, 2006, p. 61). Hyland (1999, p. 101) argues that it is the role of the academic writer to convey ‘their integrity, credibility, involvement, and a relationship to their subject matter and their readers’. Kamler and ‘Thomson (2006) note that it is the role of the tutor to do two things simultaneously: to socialize students into the academic community while at the same time involving them in exercises that teach reflexivity. This is relevant for the classroom but also how we model a ‘credible persona’ in our own engagement with policymakers and practitioners.

What are the implications for the classroom? One of the implications is the importance of designing exercises that promote ‘genre-switching’ between academia and policy. It is true that both public policy and academia require the same critical thinking skills. However, they are different idioms which are bound by different rules. For example, the idiom of ‘policy expertise’ for commenting on Middle Eastern affairs involves a cautious approach to analysis which does not always radically call into question the current power hierarchies in the international system and in the region. However, this is precisely the kind of thing we are trying to foster in the research-led classroom. Hyland (2000, p. 87) argues that ‘writers need to invest a convincing degree of assurance into their propositions, yet must avoid overstating their case and risk inviting the rejection of their arguments’. One of the fine lines in teaching genre-switching in this case, is that the parameters of ‘overstating the case’ vary between academia and the policy world. Still, it is important to stress the importance of defying these parameters so as to overcome the inertia of ‘groupthink’ – identified most prominently in International Relations scholarship by Jervis – which plagues government bureaucracies and their nongovernmental advisors.

The introduction of a class blog may help to foster and reinforce the notion that the MA seminar is a research-led, collaborative activity. When asked what form of collaborative work they would prefer in class the majority of students (4/7) said that thought seminar presentations were the most useful, but with 3 out 7 agreeing that a class blog would be a useful way for students to interact with and continue engagement with research outside of class. One student raised the prospect of group presentations (a model which has been used with some success by their other module tutors). Two students expressed muted enthusiasm
for a film, but noted that ‘if not part of the assessment [the film] would take disproportionate
time’ and that as ‘our program is political not media or film making...I’m not too sure that
most of the students would be capable of doing such a thing’. One student noted that the
reading load across the whole MA is heavy and mitigates against students participating in a
more collaborative research environment:

‘I don’t think any of this would work to conduct research more collaboratively in class. Unless it’s mandatory, people will not meet to discuss a topic. If they are friends and really like the subject, this is more likely to happen....Short films, students organising events - all of these would be great if the school made the structure easy to be used, but just reading the requirements is discouraging.’

The challenge will be to introduce a collaborative, research-based orientation to seminars
without burdening students beyond the realm of reasonable expectation at MA level. While
due to department restrictions blog participation cannot be included in grading procedures, its
status as a forum for practicing transferrable skills would likely be appealing in its own right. A
blog would also be a good tool for students to practice engaging in online policy debate. While
their essays must be written in an academic idiom, this would be a good opportunity for them
to practice the transferrable skills involved in genre-switching. It would also be a powerful
teaching tool for deconstructing what counts as ‘academic’, ‘real-world’ and ‘policy-relevant’,
how these things are judged, who by, and what forms of power and authority are involved in
their construction and deconstruction. (Post-script: In the 2012-13 school year a 1,500 word
collaborative policy brief was very successful in achieving these objectives and well-received
by students.)

Reflexivity and critical thinking: educating beyond hysteresis
The issue of modelling policy relevance raises another important question: what are we
doing this for? Inherent in Boyer’s ‘broader notion of scholarship’ is ‘a call for campuses to be
more engaged in the pressing issues of our time’ (Boyer 1990, p. 62, 76-7). In other words,
universities have a duty of care, not only to their own societies but to the global commons, to
produce informed citizens of the world and to encourage participation, critical thinking and
the ‘ability to see interconnectedness’. Boyer (1990, p. 78) argues that a pressingly important
normative role of the university is to promote the public good and ‘to channel knowledge for
humane ends’. Toohey (1999) terms this ‘the socially critical approach’.

This is particularly true as significant historical change sweeps across the Middle East. The
overthrow of dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, calls for democratic reform which are
provoking bloodshed in Syria, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, and the spectre of Iranian nuclear
power necessitate empowering and equipping students – many of whom are citizens of the
region – to confront such changes critically and advocate for the common good. Armed with
the tools of critical thinking and participatory analysis they have the potential to participate
in the most significant change to the region since 1967. Consideration of how to foster critical
thinking among this particular generation of MA students has pressing real world, real time
application.
Still, what constitutes the ‘common good’ in a changing Middle East is far from clear or agreed upon. Some voices argue that it is liberal democracy on a Western model. Others argue that it is procedural democracy, underpinned by Islamic social norms and *shari’a* law. The research-based, collaborative, critical-thinking classroom has a pressing role in light of the significant debates over the nature and structure of political life in the Middle East. Bourdieu (1990, p. 62) argues that *hysteresis* occurs when ‘the environment [it] actually encounter[s] is too different from the one to which [it is] objectively adjusted’. In Bourdieu’s conception, *hysteresis* is most often seen at a crisis point, such as the Arab Spring.

MA seminars present an opportunity for what I call ‘educating beyond hysteresis’, for teaching reflexivity in the hope of encouraging new, relevant lines of thinking about political life in the region, with implications within and outside the classroom. In particular, students are currently bombarded with a bewildering range of ‘policy experts’ in the media and on the internet, and one of the important tasks on the MA is to help them sort through, critique and interrogate the arguments presented in this sector. In terms of this broader task of scholarship, the most important critical questions to be asked are: ‘who is this speaker and what are their interests?’, ‘what is at stake in this event and what are the assumptions and idealizations made in this text?’, and ‘what are my own assumptions about how the world is?’. Perhaps more pressingly, with *hysteresis* in mind, students must be encouraged in the collaborative, research-led seminar environment to ask of each other ‘how might things have been different’ and ‘how could things be different’ in preparation for their engagement in these debates beyond the lifetime of their degree.

Kamler and Thomson (2006) have underlined the importance of postgraduate students ‘connecting to a community of scholarship’ in their writing, and the importance of engaging with texts as an ongoing but contestable conversation between disparate voices. This shift from thinking of scholars – or policymakers and pundits – as impenetrable sources of ‘authorities’ to conversant is one of the most important ‘quantum shifts’ to be developed at postgraduate level, and ‘asking questions for critical thinking’ can promote this shift. Fostering students’ ability to see that ‘all texts can be deconstructed and interrogated, even [my] own’ relates back to questions of scholarly authority and how we socialise students into the scholarly idiom while at the same time encouraging them to question the very nature of the idiom and the power structures in which it is embedded.

What are the implications for my practice? This relates back to the earlier issue of supporting and empowering students. At the foundation of the research-based seminar should be what Golding, 2011) calls a ‘thought-encouraging approach’ to small group teaching, as a way of ‘educating for critical thinking’. However, in addition to modelling the five varieties of thinking-encouraging questions – initiating, suggesting, reasoning and elaborating, evaluating and concluding – Kamler and Thomson (2006, p. 67), deploying Fairclough, argue that educating for reflexivity means encouraging students to reflect on ‘the “how we got to be where and who we are” stories that we comfortably reproduce. It also means interrogating how we might be perpetuating particular kinds of power relationships, be advancing particular ways of naming and discussing people, experiences and events’. Delamont and Atkinson (1995) call this ‘fighting familiarity’.
In terms of my practice, this means three things: asking ‘thought-encouraging questions’ and modelling what Golding (2011, p. 362) calls the ‘reverse engineered’ thinking of the expert. How did I reach the conclusions I did, in the lecture or seminar? What was the evidence I marshalled, either empirical or theoretical? What are my assumptions and how might (and should!) these be questioned? This would also involve encouraging students to ask these kinds of questions directly to each other in seminars, and to ask them of their arguments and of my own. However, overall, thought-encouraging and critical-thinking approaches are particularly critical for educating through a research-based approach, in which students are encouraged to formulate their own questions and to engage with primary sources to answer them.

However, ultimately, Biggs argues that, ‘the learner as central to the creation of meaning, not the teacher, as transmitter of knowledge’ (Biggs 1996, p. 348). Similarly Ramsden argues that ‘it is impossible to predict exactly what outcomes will occur from a course of study’ (Ramsden 2003, p. 128). The kinds of questions about and answers to contemporary challenges in the troubled Middle East and North Africa region, which will move policy thinking beyond hysteresis, will come from creative, passionate engagement of people from the region, some of whom are students from King’s College. The best we can hope to achieve in the classroom is, from moving from inquiry-led, scaffolded enquiry to research-led, open enquiry, to foster a sense of critical engagement, community and creativity. Then we must step back and let the magic happen.

References


The Role of Formal Dress in Pedagogy Teaching to Doctors

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'It is impossible to wear clothes without transmitting social signal. Every costume tells a story, often a very subtle one, about its wearer’  
(Desmond Morris 1977, p. 213)

**Introduction**

The word doctor is derived from the word ‘docere’ meaning to teach (Skyes, 1982). All doctors in the UK learn by being taught from doctors of past generations. However, unlike the extensive training which occurs to ensure a high level of clinical expertise, doctors lack the ability to teach as the appropriate teaching education is deficient (BMA, 1994a; BMA, 1994b). In recent times, the role of doctors as teachers is more recognised as a core professional activity. Formal teaching is usually carried out by medical academics, general practitioner (GP) trainers or consultants. The common thread to all these people is the professional seniority which comes with this job position. With doctors in training being accustomed to being taught by this senior grade of experience, would a reduced level of learning occur between teacher and student if the student felt superior to the teacher in their area of expertise? All doctors are obliged to teach, and acknowledge this within the Hippocratic Oath they recite on becoming doctors:

'I swear by Apollo the physician ... that by precept, lecture, and every other mode of instruction, I will impart knowledge of the Art to my own sons, and those of my teachers, and to disciples bound by a stipulation and oath according to the law of medicine......’

The General Medical Council has identified teaching as a role of the doctor. Doctors have a professional obligation to promote the training and education of other doctors (GMC, 2009). With the need for teaching becoming a priority for better patient care, teaching pedagogy courses have become a popular and usually mandatory part of training for doctors. Teaching Pedagogy can be a difficult concept to understand. The role of a teacher here is to facilitate the student’s understanding of pedagogy so that they themselves can facilitate their own students’ learning. The course at King’s College London runs approximately 12 times a month and is aimed at professionals in the medical field learning how to improve upon their teaching approach. The course is compulsory and therefore attracts students who quite often would like to be elsewhere. The course is run by facilitators from different disciplines and experience. As a facilitator on the course, I often feel overwhelmed by the seniority not only in age, but experience too of my student group. Applying an ‘air of confidence’ when teaching in order to disguise my junior position in the field has been a choice I have made easily. This takes the form of a more formal attire made up of a formal collared shirt, neck tie, smart trousers and usually a blazer. In this attire, I usually find myself becoming detached from the student group becoming
less of a peer and more of a tutor. This feeling is very subjective and although I feel more confident as a facilitator, I’m left wondering whether my students are learning more. The aim of this research is to address the question: does the formal dressing of a teacher evoke a feeling of confidence and professionalism amongst students and does this lead to improved learning.

**General effects of Attire**

Desmond Morris (1977), a human behaviourist stated that clothing transmitted social signals, and that all types of attire told a unique story about its wearer (Morris, 1977). As clothing is usually the most obvious feature first noticed on meeting a person, it can be perceived as symbolic of the wearers’ less apparent attributes. This symbolism was summarised by (Gordon et al., 1982);

1. Authority and roles are differentiated through dress
2. Display and acquisition of status is formed through dress
3. Clothing is pivotal in perpetuating traditions
4. Self-beautification, imagined or real is utilised by clothing
5. Cultural values regarding sexual identity are harnessed through clothing

These concepts are prevalent in the field of psychology and literature relating to person perception, attribution and categorisation on meeting strangers is easily found (Lennon and Davis, 1989; Gilovich et al., 2011). Simple observation and evaluation of a person’s attire can lead to initial and lasting perceptions of that person.

Scientific enquiry into the effect of clothing began approximately 65 years ago at a conference held at the Teacher’s college, Columbia University (Sybers and Roach, 1962). Since then, researchers in the field have formed many conclusions linking the use of attire and viewers responses. In a counselling setting, counsellors who were formally dressed produced less anxiety for their clients (Hubble and Gelso, 1978), and were perceived as attractive and being more of an expert in their work (Barak et al., 1982). Not surprisingly, in a college setting, females who dressed more provocatively were rated as being more sexy and seductive but interestingly, also associated with being less kind and warm (Abbey et al., 1987). This was in agreement with another study looking at student attire that found female college students who dress fashionably are rated as being more sociable by their male and female peers (Johnson et al., 1977).

Graduate instructors are pressed upon the critical importance of dressing professionally by their bosses working in graduate teaching assistant (GTA) training (Roach, 1997). This advice is usually backed up by one of the numerous studies proclaiming the significant effects of attire on compliance-gaining, speaker persuasiveness and speaker credibility (Butler and Roesel, 1989; Dunbar and Segrin, 2011). Morris et al. (1996) suggested that;

‘caution be used in drawing conclusions regarding potential payoffs of potential classroom dress based upon literature not specifically concerned with the classroom context’

(1996, p. 135)

This highlights the need to focus more specifically on the way students view of teachers are altered by attire rather than the impact of clothing in marketing, selling and seeking
employment (Shao et al., 2004; Rouh-Nan Yan, 2011). The classroom is a very different environment with unique characteristics. The masses of research which has been undertaken focussing on attire in general may not apply.

**Effects of Attire in the Classroom**

The teacher-student interaction is one that grows over time. With a familiarity developing between the teacher and student, the effects of that initial impression associated with attire may decrease over that period (Roach, 1997). A second important consideration is that the classroom does not revolve around financial gain and profit like the business place. It is a place for learning.

A study undertaken by Reeder and King (1984), used four different clothing styles to address the importance of clothing style in the teaching profession. They discovered that stylishness and femininity had a positive influence on high school students. Peterson and Johnson (1985) also sampled high school students drawing conclusions that more formally dressed teachers were viewed and knowledgeable and less formally dressed students sympathetic and fair. Rollman (1980) used a sample of undergraduate students to show the same.

Clothing choice can communicate status, power, responsibility and the ability to be successful (Turner-Bowker, 2001). A formally dressed teacher in a suit and dress shoes is rated as being more competent where as a teacher dressed in jeans and a t-shirt deemed more sociable, extraverted and having an interesting presentation (Morris et al., 1996). These findings were substantiated by Workman et al. (1993) in college teaching assistants; those wearing formal clothing were rated as more intellectual and credible over their more informally dressed colleagues.

An important study conducted in 1992 by Davis et al. found that more respect was given to teachers dressed more formally when their photographs were shown to junior high students. A study by Lukavsky et al. also investigated students’ perceptions of teachers based on the formality of their clothing. There were three groups: formal dress, moderate dress and informal dress. The formal group were dressed in a dark two piece skirted suit with a white blouse, the moderate dressed group were in a pleated, button front skirt, a long sleeved buttoned cardigan and a white blouse and the informal dressed group were in dark jeans with a long sleeved sweater with a high neck line. The study found that although the informal group where deemed to be the most approachable, they were also given the least respect.

It would appear that current literature seems to favour formality of dress to be associated with more respect and an appreciation of knowledge whereas a more casually dressed teacher is one that is more approachable and inviting.

**Perceptions of students attending the ‘Teaching the Teachers’ course – Methods**

The teaching the teachers course is a one day course that run’s approximately once a month at the medical school campus at King’s College Hospital, London. The course is mandatory for all doctors in training but is also open to other employees of the NHS that have an active role in teaching. As a course facilitator I help design, teach and evaluate the course. Currently I hold an Ophthalmic Specialty Training position of two years experience, with a total of eight years experience as a doctor. Two years experience in my specialised area of expertise can be
perceived by my peers as quite junior and comparisons to the old style grading of senior house officer (SHO) can be made. We usually have a class size of 18 students made up of medical professionals with as little experience as being a newly qualified doctor to a consultant who has completed all their training needs. The course is made up of interactive lectures throughout the morning with an informal microteaching session in the afternoon.

Evaluation forms are administered at the end of the course to all students who attend for the day. This study employed the use of these forms to research the title of the study. The course enrolls 18 students split between three teachers. I am personally responsible for teaching the microteaching session for six students on each course. The study was undertaken over a period of four course dates giving a total study sample of 24 students. I split the four courses into two formally dressed courses and two informally dressed courses. These were done alternately so that the first and third course was formally dressed and second and fourth were informally dressed. This was done to minimise any bias that may occur from improving teaching skills and subject content from course progression. The teaching content and style was kept constant as much as possible. Formal dress consisted of a collared shirt, neck tie, smart trousers, blazer and smart shoes. Informal dress consisted of a round neck T-shirt, jeans and a pair of casual training shoes.

Evaluation forms are a part of the course proceedings and no alterations were made to the questions in order to minimise responder bias. I was unable to control for sample selection bias as the students are enrolled onto the course on a first come first serve basis. To alter this would have interfered with the selection of different levels of experience students had. The level of experience within their specialty training a student had was rated as a number. The table below demonstrates the scoring system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Title</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Year 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Trainee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Trainee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Trainee</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialty Trainee</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialty Trainee</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialty Trainee</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialty Trainee</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Trainee</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td></td>
<td>over 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>individually judged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This number was then used as a benchmark to assess whether patient satisfaction altered with rising level of professional seniority.
The questions put forward on the evaluation were as follows:

**Level of training?**

- Did you enjoy the course? Please rate on a satisfaction score of 1 being very enjoyable to 5 not being enjoyable at all.
- Did you find the course information useful? Please rate on a satisfaction score of 1 being very useful to 5 not being useful at all.
- Did you find the course tutor knowledgeable? Please rate on a satisfaction score of 1 being very knowledgeable to 5 not being knowledgeable at all.
- Did you find the course tutor approachable? Please rate on a satisfaction score of 1 being very approachable to 5 not being approachable at all.
- What would improve the course?
- Any other comments?

**Perceptions of students attending the ‘Teaching the Teachers’ course - Results**

The tables below summarise the results comparing the formally dressed courses with the non-formally dressed courses. Twelve responses each were obtained giving a 100 per cent response rate. The tables below summarises the response to the questionnaire.

**Formally dressed results:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Enjoyable</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Knowledgeable</th>
<th>Approachable</th>
<th>Improvements</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>better refreshments</td>
<td>very enjoyable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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Informally dressed results:

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<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
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<th>Knowledgeable</th>
<th>Approachable</th>
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<td>better pre-course material please</td>
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For the purpose of the study, the improvements and comments field will be omitted from analysis as they do not relate specifically to the subject of attire on students perceptions.

The graphs below demonstrate the average score for each years of experience and the different criteria on the questionnaire.
The chart below summarises the above findings into formal dressed vs. informal dressed.

Summary satisfaction scores for learning

- **Enjoyable**
  - Formal dressed: 54
  - Informally dressed: 52

- **Useful**
  - Formal dressed: 50
  - Informally dressed: 56

- **Knowledgeable**
  - Formal dressed: 56
  - Informally dressed: 58

- **Approachable**
  - Formal dressed: 58
  - Informally dressed: 56
Discussion

The results of this study corroborate the published literature on the influence of teacher’s dress on students’ perceptions. Although a larger study would able me to carry out statistical testing, it is apparent that a formally dressed teacher evokes a perception of knowledge whereas an informally dressed teacher invites approachability. What is interesting to note that the question of enjoyment and usefulness of a course usually compliment each other to provide a feeling of learning from a course. The present study provides a mixed picture of this across the two groups. We could speculate here that despite the teacher perception by students, the facilitation of learning took place.

A real question here is whether the perception of teachers based on their attire leads to any improvement in the students’ ability to learn. Whether some may argue that a teacher should be approachable and knowledgeable in order to facilitate learning, the study shows that students enjoyed the course and found it useful across both the groups. This suggests that they did indeed learn from the course and although they may have found the teacher knowledgeable or approachable, they were still able to learn. Other factors need to be considered, does the perception of teachers actually change the learning outcome, or is it just a perception? Although published research identifies the various perceptions of teacher attire on students, none link this to actual learning outcomes such as career progression or exam results. Whilst a study design to test this would be possible, the study would be crowded with bias and introduce questions of ethics for sure. Perhaps the comparison of state school learning compared to private education starts the debate but socioeconomic class, financial incentive and a whole host of other factors will come into play.

The ability of a teacher to facilitate learning is based upon their skills as a teacher and less on their attire. Although, there does seem to be a link between student perception of knowledge based on attire, this does not necessarily reflect their learning. A hypothesis here would be that a teacher whether formally dressed or informally dressed can make the class enjoyable and useful with other techniques at their disposal such as confidence, knowledge and the willingness to teach. I suspect that much of my insecurity of teaching students is indeed based on my own security of teaching and not my attire. Looking closely at the seniority of my group, three people were enrolled with seven years of experience. When asked to rate the level of knowledge the teacher had, I was given a score of five when formally dressed and five and four when dressed informally. Although they had five years more experience both groups rated me highly in the knowledge criteria whether formally or informally dressed. This would suggest that a teacher can facilitate knowledge through other means and attire as expected covers up the teacher’s own insecurities.

This study primarily focuses on the interaction between student perceptions of teacher attire, but we must not forget the fact that both the student and teacher come from a medical role in their careers. Although there is no research specifically looking at the formal attire on the role of a teacher within healthcare, literature does exist looking at the views and perceptions of the patients being treated. Kocks et al. undertook a study assessing the formal clothing styles of GP and found a GP’s style of clothing alters the initial level of confidence in that doctor from a patient point of view. They concluded vanity was a functional attribute for the GP (Kocks
et al., 2010). A similar study conducted in a hospital setting found corroborating results with casual dress evoking the least amount of confidence (Gherardi et al., 2009). A doctor’s attire is important in establishing a good first impression in any interaction with patients (McKinstry and Wang, 1991; Hochberg 2007). It is believed to be a primary goal in developing a successful professional relationship revolving around trust (Short, 1993; McKenna et al., 2007). With this ingrained within the culture and practice of a doctor, we should ask how easy is it to dissociate from these expectations in other aspects of a doctor’s role where patients are not involved.

Dressing formally induces an air of confidence which allows me to teach in a different style, one that is more factual based and didactic in nature. Whereas when I dress informally, I identify more with my peers allowing me to teach with a more interactive style. Both ways allow teaching to occur and therefore a learning response from students. As a teacher, if I feel confident in the way I teach, then my students will gain in their learning. Although previously, my approach was for a more formal style, the results of this study and my own growing confidence as a teacher questions my dress style. I feel myself wanting to adopt a more ‘comfortable’ style of dress in order to address my students as peers because, that is what they are. As a doctor, my role is to teach my fellow peers no matter what level of seniority they may be, however doing this dressed in a T-shirt and jeans may not be something that will come easily. Every teacher should look at their own circumstances and adopt an appropriate attire they themselves feel confident with.

Limitations of the study were that the data collected was from one area of the country in one hospital training programme. This obviously lends to limitation in cultural and demographic diversity. Also it should be noted that although this study aims to look just at teacher attire, this is impossible to control for. Formal dress can provide a note of professionalism; however a broad array of teacher attitudes and behavioural patterns should ideally be taken into account. These characteristics as well as facial appearance, gender, ethnicity and age would all have played a part in the results of this study. Although I aim to be clean shaven, this is not performed on a daily basis. Does the level of stubble I present with alter the views of my student? Does it open issues of religious belief, general hygiene or laziness? All these factors would need addressing in a new study design, one that also takes into account my age, gender and ethnicity.

The difference between the two groups is identifiable here as distinguishing between the extremes of attire is easy. However perceptions vary among students, one person’s idea of formal dress may be another person’s idea of dressing casually. Although this perception does vary from person to person, we visit the idea again of how this perception can vary depending on the student’s career path. For example, would the doctors on this study perceive teachers’ attire in the same way a person working in a dirtier environment such as a farmer or mechanic. Does this perception rely solely on the cleanliness of the environment so that the destruction of nice and expensive clothes is a factor or does this perception result from the nature of the job? Does a doctor who deals with the responsibility of patient care have anymore of a reason to dress formally than someone responsible for animals or cars?
Additional research examining the dress sense of teachers’ in their role of teaching medical professionals beyond this preliminary study is warranted. This study deals briefly with teacher perceptions from students with a medical background but has not addressed the specifics of these impressions. Further research should focus on how the views of doctors by society are incorporated in to learning, not only from a teaching perspective but a student one too. We should delve further into the mindset of the doctor and concentrate more closely on how they themselves identify with their job role and their image perceptions. By doing this, their role as a teacher can be further understood.

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Adaptive supervision according to varying project trajectories: appraisal from a postdoctoral scientist’s perspective

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**Introduction**  
At their best, student research projects in science can enable the student to add technical skills to contextualise their knowledge and develop creative independence within their discipline, and can provide the supervisor with a means of testing unanswered hypotheses and novel methods, while honing teaching and management proficiency; at their worst, they can be viewed as interminable time drains with little beneficial end-product for either party. While there are undoubtedly unmotivated students and uninterested supervisors, it’s likely that in the majority of cases both individuals embark with good intentions. Supervised student projects in science range from relatively short projects conducted at the culmination of three years of undergraduate study to extended projects undertaken for the fulfilment of a philosophical doctorate (PhD). Increasingly, projects of an intermediate duration are undertaken by students at MA level. Proportional rises in the biological and physical sciences within a general increase in the number of students in higher education (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2010) have intensified the demand for supervised research projects in these fields. Accordingly, the responsibility of supervising these projects often falls in some part to postdoctoral researchers in the discipline in question with little if any explicit training in supervision. Evidence of proficiency at research is often taken as evidence of suitability to supervise. The principal objectives of this work are: first, to critically discuss the purpose of MA level projects to provide a theoretical yet objective perspective for this case study from the viewpoint of supervisor and student; second, to investigate the applicability of published models for the supervision of such projects; third, to discuss theoretical factors which commonly disrupt projects, with the aim of improving their identification in practice; fourth, to propose a self-devised model for successful supervision based on evaluation of the literature and my personal perspective; and finally to evaluate my current practices in light of this model, with the aim of improving future performance. This work is divided into sections according to these aims. Personal reflections are limited to the final section with the objective of presenting the material neutrally and by doing so to enable postdoctoral readers of this work to integrate easily the basic framework presented with their own teaching philosophies.

**Background and context**  
Research can be considered as any critical or creative process by which there is an attempt to increase knowledge or improve practice. It therefore includes diverse approaches varying greatly in their aims, procedures and objective end-points. Nevertheless, research
practices all share common core characteristics: a disciplined mode of enquiry; a desire for conceptual or technical improvement; a systematic means of testing and interpreting results; and a commitment to disseminate findings. Supervised research projects provide a means of endowing students with the skills, values and practices necessary not just for a career in research but more fundamentally for developing their proficiency in learning. Through research it is possible to develop skills in enquiry, theory development and testing, problem-solving, strategising, interpretation and reporting – providing a framework for life-long learning (Reeve et al., 2002).

The desire for a close interdependence of research and teaching is deep-rooted in the ethos of the higher-education system and emphasised by government policy-makers and institutional rhetoric producers. Between academics, great variation in appraisal of this nexus exists. A phenomenographic study of undergraduate learning reported five gradations of the perceived relationship in academics, ranging from a fully-integrated view where research and teaching are inseparable, through symbiotic, hybrid and transmission views to a weakly-related view, according to which the two learning paths are considered distinct (Robertson, 2007). This study also suggested that the weakly-related view was most characteristic of academics in scientific fields. There is some basis for the belief that teaching and research should be independent for at least the onset of higher education. It is arguable that in these fields there is a need for undergraduate teaching to furnish the student with large bodies of knowledge, which until acquired preclude student involvement in research. However, the upsurge in project work in the latter stages of undergraduate science degrees, and the ubiquity of extended projects in postgraduate science courses, necessitates conflux of teaching and research. It is also a defendable outlook that providing students with some appreciation of the research environment at an early stage of their higher education would heighten their evaluative and critical skills, which would in turn improve both laboratory- and classroom-based learning. Research can therefore be seen to have educational value for the student. A good project can serve as career preparation for an increasingly fluid job market or a means of broadening skill-sets for research or related employment in industry. According to Phillips and Pugh (1994), a good researcher:

‘has something to say that peers want to hear; has command of the subject, so can evaluate the worth of what others are doing; has astuteness to discover where a useful contribution can be made; has mastery of appropriate techniques currently being used, and awareness of their limitations; is able to communicate results effectively in the professional area; is able to operate in an international context; and has the ability to evaluate their own work and that of others in the light of current developments, so can grow with the discipline.’ (p. 22)

By implication, the research project in its optimal form may therefore permit the development of skills which are not simply further developments of those learned in the classroom. These skills are of undoubted worth to an employer; moreover, a research project provides yet further means for skill development. For instance, the student must hone comprehension skills, work within a specific role in a team, and transform into reality the supervisor’s vision for the project. These are all generalist performance functions that employers seek. While it may be beyond the scope of a research project of short duration to permit development of skills in all
these areas, it is noteworthy that improvement is not inevitable following student involvement in a seemingly successful project ending in publication. If experimental focus is excessively restricted, or not contextualised, educational value is decreased and the student may complete the project with skills solely useful in settings similar to the one in which they were learned:

‘To be a member of a team directed by a distant and very busy leader, building just one technical link in a complicated experiment, is an inadequate apprenticeship to the art; it is as if the pupils of Rubens were to be accounted artists after five years of painting-in the buttons on his larger compositions. High technical standards may be achieved by the student, without a grasp of the deeper intellectual issues.’


In light of Humboldt’s traditional conceptualisation of universities as communities of learners unselfishly working together in pursuit of knowledge (Elton, 2005), this produces a paradox: Which, out of a project yielding a scientifically meaningful outcome but restricting rounded development of student skills, and a project with results of limited scientific note, but of great educational value to the student, is of most worth? Despite scientific and educational advances being more likely to be associated than mutually exclusive, the pertinence of such rhetoric implies that the purpose of supervised projects is often poorly defined.

It remains open to debate whether a project should be judged as an exercise in creative scholarship or a training opportunity, whether the student should be considered an apprentice to the researcher or a colleague learning to emulate their proficiency as a researcher. According to the ‘technical rationality’ model the student is an apprentice to be trained and therefore procedure and technique are emphasised. Contrastingly, by the ‘negotiated-order’ model of supervision, the process is more adaptable, interpretive and interactionist (Acker et al., 1994). In scientific work both procedure and creativity are important. Ideally, an approach amalgamating both approaches offering training in practical procedure and encouraging philosophical creativity should be followed to maximally benefit both parties. However, MA projects must generally conform to certain compulsory requirements. The student needs to fulfil these, or at the very least demonstrate that they will fulfil these, before negotiating supplemental project directions. As such, the supervisor can present negotiation as a right that must be earned by the student on the basis of the quality of the work they produce. In this structured, interactionist framework suggested, the supervisor may also be considered a mentor or coach. For supervision of MA level projects, an approach resembling a cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al., 1989) seems suitable. Accordingly, the supervisor observes the student performing tasks, and coaches them through difficulties enabling them to perform like an expert. The success of this approach is contingent on a great deal of conscious appraisal throughout by both individuals. (The considerations associated with tailoring tasks and supervision to student development are discussed in Successful supervision from a theoretical perspective).

The existence of these competing models of supervision also implies that the supervisor is often presented with conflicting interests. The reasons for these conflicts are complex. Researchers are typically involved in multiple projects and with the trend for funding to be granted to studies testing specific questions rather than for free inquiry within a field, there is pressure for
each project in which they are involved to yield associated publications. While in many cases
the supervisor has contractual obligations to provide an educational service to the student,
it is worth noting that many junior researchers with no such contractual obligations, and for
whom self-establishment is a primary goal, are increasingly charged with the task of supervising
student projects. Furthermore, the globalisation of university-based research and the associated
mobilisation of researchers within this community do little to simplify matters. If researchers
and students worked in fixed locations for long periods then, from the supervisor’s perspective,
selecting their optimal strategy would rely on weighing up the short- and long-term benefits
of their actions. Tasking the student with a highly-specialised, but narrowly-defined role may
improve their chances of producing a quick result, but may stifle their creativity and fail to
nurture their autonomy. Alternatively, committing a lot of time with the student contextualising
the project as a whole and the student’s role within it in terms of both theory and practice
may slow down the student’s short-term productivity but improve their wider understanding,
making them a more self-sufficient researcher, with whom the supervisor may develop a more
balanced professional relationship. However, with student-supervisor relationships increasingly
limited to a one-off project, there may be little intellectual repayment for the supervisor for large
investments of time. In fact, with many students performing multiple projects with different
supervisors, from a tactical viewpoint there is some incentive for the supervisor to free-ride to
some extent, skimping in the educational support given to the student, in favour of objective
benefits to the field of research itself, which may in turn benefit the supervisor.

Nevertheless, irrespective of the educational framework in which the project is conducted,
there exist some fundamental functions that must be provided by the supervisor and similarly
some student obligations requisite to facilitate smooth running and successful completion of
research-project work. The supervisor is ultimately responsible for several tasks, in which it is
of educational value for the student to be involved. These include the development of research
questions within supported conceptual frameworks, the provision of theoretical means and
physical tools necessary to assess these questions, and tools to analyse and interpret resultant
data. Creating an environment in which information can be mutually and freely passed either
orally, in writing or electronically is vital. This permits the supervisor to explain potentially
confusing terminology or conventions, to evaluate student performance readily and to perform
other important functions of error detection and related tuition. Such dialogues also allow the
supervisor to convey the importance of conducting research according to implicit ethics and
values. These aspects of the supervisor-student relationship are the most potentially rewarding
for the student and are influential in the student donating vast amounts of time often without
payment. Interpersonal communication skills in instruction and constructive feedback are
crucial in all these domains. Discussion of models of supervision which aim to optimise
supervisor performance in these functions forms the basis of later sections of this work.

Several factors specific to the supervision of postgraduate MA projects warrant mention.
Great variation exists in the discipline-specific experience held by the student. Many
students undertake an MA degree in order to deepen knowledge in the same subject gained
in a bachelor’s degree. These students will have considerable discipline-specific experience.
In contrast, another common motivation for carrying out postgraduate study is to switch
disciplines, in which case the student will have generalised knowledge of the academic
environment but less discipline-specific knowledge. This variation in underlying motivation has some bearing on who takes the helm as the driving force of the project and, accordingly, the precise role of the student in the project. However, the student must enter the project with at least a determined effort to perform certain functions. A fundamental role is to perform the tasks entrusted to them with due diligence, to continually attempt to develop initiative, and importantly to critically and consciously evaluate the course of the various stages of the project. If the student is seemingly unaware of these responsibilities, the supervisor must make attempts to rectify this situation, and where possible help the student to develop skills necessary for their adequate performance. Additionally, scientific research is increasingly conducted within multidisciplinary teams, to which each member contributes a highly-specialised role. The supervisor of a MA level project should aim to impart the practicalities of this arrangement to the student. Doing this may require the student to be trained in several domains by different specialists. Such training will enable the student to not only experience contrasting professional approaches but also tailor their own conduct to maximally utilise the time that each specialist spends with them.

**Successful supervision from a theoretical perspective**

As discussed above, the roles of a supervisor go beyond benevolent well-wishing as exhibited by tutors, colleagues or friends, and are more professionally focused. Broadly, and from the student’s perspective, they are to produce student development and provide training in techniques and values (Wisker, 2005). The intricacies of the role vary between disciplines but will be examined here in terms for supervision of science-based MA level projects. Since the majority of research into supervision has been conducted with focus on the supervision of PhD studies or with reference to alternative academic fields, it is necessary to base this appraisal on somewhat contrasting educational models. This highlights a need for research into the supervision of MA level projects in science; the inferences made are therefore presented with appropriate caution. Nevertheless, this section critically reviews the literature with the aim of emphasising characteristics common to good practices of supervision as well as specific needs for the supervision of short- to mid-length postgraduate projects. It begins with discussion of student development before examining approaches that the supervisor can adopt to take account of changing student needs.

Both anecdotal and empirical reports data suggest student development over the course of project work, and this is indeed one aim of such work. The counselling literature presents several models of student development, which though conceived specifically in relation to that field may have some relevance to the development of postgraduate scientific researchers. An early model by Hogan (1964) insightfully discussed development from student insecurity and dependency, to self-confidence and, finally, creativity. Complementarily, Gaoni and Neumann (1974) described the path from pupil to apprentice, and from here through the development of therapeutic personality to mutual consultation. Blount’s (1982) model emphasised the student’s attentional focus and capability at each stage: students begin with internal, self-evaluative appraisal of their adequacy, and then of their dependency, before developing autonomy in restricted settings and concluding with total professional independence. While the labels given to the various stages of student development vary by theorist, these models suggest numerous objective stages. Comparably, MA level project work begins
with project inception, during which the student familiarises themselves with the subject literature and practices, followed by skill development during active project work, and by which skills are latterly consolidated. Understanding and contextualisation of the specifically acquired skill set then enables development of research-based autonomy. On account of this student development, it is therefore vital that supervision itself incorporates an adaptive operationalisation, which includes supervisor evaluation of student performance.

Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987) proposed the Integrated Developmental Model (IDM) of counselling supervision to address this need. Identifying that student awareness, motivation and autonomy exhibit systematic relationships with student proficiency, they characterised the trainee’s likely mindset at each of three stages and tailored supervision recommendations to these stages. In Level 1 of the IDM the student is self-focused, evaluating their own behaviour (trying to implement skills), thoughts (figuring out what to do next), and emotions (anxiety, excitement, hopefulness). These emotions lead to high motivation in students at this stage but limit their autonomy. It is also likely that students will be particularly attentive at this stage. As such, novice counsellors at Level 1 of IDM can be seen to share many characteristics with novice postgraduate researchers undertaking MA projects. It is to the supervisor’s advantage to make full use of this initial impetus. After some time, students become more professionally confident and enter Level 2 of the IDM, where their attentional focus is primarily on the client. This can have contrasting effects, leading to increased understanding and empathy in some cases and diminished effectiveness perhaps by diminished motivation in others. It is arguable that the counselling model is not readily applicable to students of science as there is perhaps little value in changing one’s attentional focus when faced with a test tube or computer. However, the shift from subjective evaluation of oneself to objective, critical evaluation of the research-based environment marks a fundamental development in research proficiency. Moreover, in qualitative experimental psychology research which typically involves the researcher performing an interview, the benefits of a shift from a self- to interviewee-focused mode of thought are similarly unquestionable. It is potentially valuable for the supervisor to encourage self-evaluation at this stage, when research practices become more automatic as the confidence gained by the student may steepen their developmental trajectory. Transition to Level 3 of the IDM is marked by increased awareness of competence or meta-competence. The student is more able to apply contextually-relevant knowledge as the setting requires and evaluate their performance with accuracy. As multiple development across multiple domains of practice reaches this standard, the student enters Level 3i, the integrated level.

This model therefore provides a student developmental framework, to which the supervisor can tailor their supervisory practice, both in terms of the style they adopt and also the tasks that they allocate to the student, throughout the research endeavour. The benefits to the supervisor of enabling transition through these stages are that the supervisory relationship becomes more mutually collegiate. Student development is believed to occur nonlinearly, with periods of rapid improvement interspersed with relative stagnation. Encouraging student evaluation and conscious appraisal of this development by the supervisor may enable developmental bottlenecks to be shot through more efficiently. Similarly, as alluded to by the inclusion of Level 3i, and according to student skill-set, development is likely to be multiply paced across different domains of research practice. It is essential that the supervisor adequately judges multiple
tones of student performance across these domains and adopts an approach which facilitates development across these domains optimally through interactions with the student.

There are a number of dimensions along which interactive supervision should be modulated. Selecting dimensions generally accepted to be universal to human interaction (Fiske et al., 2007), Wubbels and colleagues (2006) showed how the supervisor can manipulate their proximity and influence within the supervisory relationship with interpersonal implications as Figure 1 below illustrates. It is important to note that these dimensions are independent yet their effect is combined. For example, when the supervisor is both influential and at close quarters, they can be seen to offer a substantial lead to the student; if their influence diminishes but they remain close, this imparts greater responsibility and freedom to the student, while offering advisory support. Over the course of a PhD project an experienced supervisor should aim to use variation along these behavioural dimensions as a means of evaluating student performance and fostering independence. It is perhaps more difficult to do this within the confines of MA level research, where it is likely that influence and proximity will naturally remain elevated throughout the project. However, it is potentially informative to the supervisor to attempt this. Furthermore, it is likely to be developmentally and educationally valuable for the student for variation to occur. The MA project supervisor can perhaps moderate the interpersonal relationship on a smaller scale, giving the student independence while iteratively checking their progress on a specific task. Alternatively, the supervisor can set aside a supplementary task in which they attempt to manipulate their practice. Choosing to attempt this within a task that is not the main focus of the student project may help the student become more autonomous, while reducing pressure on them to achieve this.

**Figure 1.** Model of interpersonal supervisory behaviour (Wubbels et al., 2006).
In a similar vein, Gatfield (2005) suggested that supervisory interpersonal moderation can be achieved in practice by implementing changing management styles throughout the project. At the onset the supervisor must provide structure in terms of the tasks they set, the ease of conceptualisation of the theory they present and also by the interpersonal support they offer. As the project progresses, these practices may diminish rendering the controlling force more of a guide and permitting the student greater freedom of scholarly thought and action. Again, while it may seem somewhat uncomfortable for a supervisor of an MA project to attempt to speed up these processes, the benefits of doing so are apparent to both the student and also the supervisor themselves.

It therefore appears that as students gain independence as researchers they need less structured supervision and exhibit greater professional freedom. As discussed above, the trajectory of each student’s development is idiosyncratic and nonlinear. From the perspective of MA level projects in science, negotiation is a vital tool for student supervision for both parties as it permits mutually-concordant, adaptable time-frames for work and progress-dependent end-points. Negotiation in this context incorporates not only theoretical discussion of principle but also discussion in light of physical observation. If the student is able to demonstrate that they have adequately performed a given task, then they may proceed to the next stage of the project. Conveying both long- and short-term requirements and assessing student adherence to explicitly proposed objectives underpins sustained progress in MA level projects. Negotiation thus occurs multiply on numerous timescales.

**Factors which commonly derail student projects**

Innumerable events can have a disharmonising effect on project work. Some personal catastrophes are unforeseeable and unpreventable – here, it is the supervisor’s role to act with empathy and understanding. More generally, the establishment of an environment facilitating honest and open discussion and the foresight to plan alternative contingencies can minimise the potentially detrimental impact of other common impediments. While the supervisor-student relationship is fundamentally professional, it is advisable for the supervisor to have some notion of the student’s life outside work. If the supervisor is aware of factors which may impinge on student productivity, which may include events varying from organising a wedding to a relationship break up, to financial problems, or moving house, then they may gain some understanding of either why productivity has changed or the extent to which the student is able to maintain professional conduct when faced with additional pressures. The following discussion suggests likely obstacles and strategies to overcome them. The schema presented in the next section is proposed in light of these issues.

A common problem is a loss of momentum or stagnation. Often the motivational and emotional impetus which propels the student through the initial stages of the project is lost, and replaced by feelings of boredom, demotivation and isolation. Thus, while stagnation is the result, the feelings causing it are varied. Isolation can be remedied by involving the student in peer-group activities, directing them to online/email discussion forums, and maintaining contact through regular meetings. These meetings should permit the supervisor to provide feedback on work conducted and help build student confidence. Questioning feedback in which the supervisor latches on to a particular aspect and encourages the
student to critically assess matters further than they have done hitherto, is a fantastic means of developing creativity and helping the student to maintain excitement in their work, because they will continue to see the topic through fresh eyes. Furthermore, in these meetings the supervisor should aim to maintain momentum by setting intermediate target objectives such as the presentation of a work-in-progress seminar. If motivation is waning, several strategic approaches have been suggested in the literature (see, for example, Stevens and Asmar, 1999), which vary in terms of their professional/personal focus. For instance, revisiting a particularly inspirational or eloquent paper, or planning something to do after finishing a project stage can be helpful. If the supervisor makes suggestions based on their own experiences as a student, it may help not just student motivation but also the supervisor-student dynamic.

Ineffective time management can also impact on the success of MA projects. The progression into the postgraduate education presents the student with more freedom than their prior educational experiences. Many directly-relevant, discipline-specific and indirectly-relevant, transferrable-skills courses are on offer and without clear focus these courses can congest student timetables. More relevantly to project work itself, is the issue that research is in many respects boundless. Answering one hypothesis may produce more questions than answers. While adaptive negotiation of project endpoints is the best way to get the most out of a specific project, it is vital that clear project boundaries and timelines are set.

**Framework for adaptive supervision of MA level projects**

To ensure good supervision of MA projects in science it is key for the supervisor to consciously evaluate student performance, their own performance and the effectiveness of supervisor-student interactions. This section presents a three-staged, self-devised schema for supervising such projects, which is illustrated in Figure 2 and emphasises the importance of iterative instruction, research, feedback, negotiation and appraisal. It aims to be maximally simple, so that the supervisor can readily consider their role during and between meetings; and time efficient on account of typical time commitments faced by both the supervisor and the student. The schema is described here chronologically.

The supervisor must ensure that the necessary planning has been undertaken pre-project to make the most use of the burst of excited motivation associated with project onset. This requires the development of a conceptual framework, hypotheses to be tested and, very importantly, consideration of boundaries for the project. For MA projects it is advisable that obligatory yet time-consuming bureaucratic and organisational requirements, such as obtaining permission to conduct research from local ethics committee and departmental research and development teams, are met at this stage. At this stage it is also common for the supervisor to prepare a project description which may be circulated to the prospective students. As this is the first opportunity that the supervisor has to engage the student, this description should be written with this in mind. It may be beneficial for it to refer to key publications forming the project’s conceptual foundation to enable interested students to familiarise themselves with this literature at the earliest possible time. Informal meetings and email discussions with potential students can also prove useful in this regard.
The project begins in earnest with an initial meeting – solely between supervisor and student and solely related to this project - the importance of which cannot be overstated. The supervisor should present the project to the student in an engaging manner, clearly communicating the objectives of the project and detailing the work to be done. Student and supervisor should aim to sketch out a timeline for the project including dates by which agreed milestones should be reached. This timeline may be re-negotiated as the project unfolds; however, explicitly agreeing important intermediate and final objectives will help maintain continued motivation and perhaps also split the daunting prospect of the whole project into manageable sub-tasks. This initial meeting is also important for establishing some interpersonal characteristics of the supervisor-student relationship. Discussing the student’s previous experiences both professionally and personally can help the supervisor identify areas that the student perceives as strengths and weaknesses, and can help tailor supervision accordingly. Discussing more personal matters is important for establishing supervisor-student meetings as open and honest forums for discussion. Before the conclusion of this meeting, the supervisor should set a task, by default a focused literature review, to be conducted by the student prior to the next meeting.

The first catch-up meeting should follow within weeks of the initial meeting. By this time the student will be immersed in the literature and ready to begin practical work on the project. Discussion of the task from the initial meeting begins the first cycle of critical discussion of work and negotiation of the next task, on the basis to which the previous task was completed. The supervisor will drive negotiations at this juncture, but it is hoped that over time the tone of these negotiations will shift from direction to discussion. By making critical evaluation and appraisal the subject of the supervisor-student interface, the goals and focus of the project will be continually emphasised. In the context of these discussions, the supervisor should present a new task or continuation of the original task, explaining its importance to the project and how it should be approached and setting a date for its completion. Central to this model of supervision is iterative planning, work, negotiation and appraisal. It is therefore essential that numerous catch-up sessions occur throughout the project. Timetable restrictions may enforce some sessions to be carried out by telephone or email but personal meetings should be favoured when possible. Given the restricted time that the supervisor can spend with the student, much rests on fostering a trusting relationship by which both parties are productive in the absence of the other. The student should be expected to perform the majority of research in the absence of the supervisor. The supervisor in return should prepare clear objectives for each meeting, especially since failing to clearly communicate tasks or objectives can detrimentally affect motivation and progress.

After the project is completed, a final appraisal meeting between supervisor and student can serve several key purposes. A number of questionnaires have been developed in order to systematically evaluate the supervision relationship. Both parties should carry audits of their own independent and joint conduct. The efficacy of this meeting is therefore contingent on the supervisor creating an open and honest learning environment throughout the project. This final appraisal of the supervisor on their own performance should inform their supervisory conduct in future project work.
**Self-reflection and conclusions**

Prior to this work, my style of supervision emphasised the transference of skills to students. I realise now that this represents just one of numerous aspects of the supervisor’s function. While I sincerely hope that my scientific ethic and rigour were implicit in my practices, I can see that explicit discussion of these factors can facilitate student research-based learning. This assignment has highlighted to me the value of keeping ahead of the game intellectually. Planning and organisation are of paramount importance, as clarity of project objective is vital for clarity of instruction. Time between meetings can be successfully used by supervisor as well as supervisee, through critical evaluation of objective performance. As a post-doctoral researcher, my own research skills are still developing. As such, it is sometimes difficult to negotiate movable project timelines on the basis of changing scientific information. I accept that this is an area in which my current supervisory practices can improve. Developing the proposed supervisory model has enabled me to mindfully assess crucial factors for successful supervision; further, the model itself will shape my future supervisory practices. The model was developed in light of the published literature and my own supervisory beliefs. Assessing supervision from a pedagogical perspective has given me insight into my own performance. I believe that students may perform better in their roles as supervisees on the basis of equivalent knowledge and will encourage thought from students along these lines. Specifically, I will gauge their future career plans and variably emphasise the academic and vocational skills offered by the project on the basis of this assessment. Following on from the self-reflection associated with this assignment offers a means of improving my own supervisory performance that I am keen not only to attempt to implement but also to develop further in my future supervisory experiences.
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