

Teaching Portfolio

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*Please note a more extensive portfolio with an appendix is available on request:
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List of Teaching Experience

May 2016. Teaching Exchange. University of Pompeu Fabra.

“Citizenship in a Global Context” – seminar for undergraduate politics students.

January 2014 – December 2014: Non-Stipendiary Lecturer in Politics, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford.

Contact Reference: Prof. Gillian Peele, gillian.peele@lmh.ox.ac.uk

“Prelims” – *The Theory and Practice of the Democratic State*

Group of eight students, two sessions.

Discussion seminars on Mill’s *On Liberty* and Rousseau’s *The Social Contract*.

Theory of Politics

Five visiting students from the US (one pair, three individually)

Two Oxford students (in a pair)

Four Oxford students for group revision before examinations.

Small tutorial sessions on contemporary political theory covering topics such as liberty, equality, democracy, political obligation, social justice, global justice, multiculturalism and feminism.

The History of Political Thought

One visiting student (Four week course),

Revision with one Oxford student.

Small tutorial sessions focussing on Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau.

University of KwaZulu-Natal: Philosophy Tutor, Jan 2009 – Sept 2010.

Contact Reference: Dr. Heidi Matisonn, matisonnh@ukzn.ac.uk

1st Year Introduction to Philosophy

2010: Five groups (between 15- 25 students)

Skills based tutorials focusing on summarizing, note-taking, academic reading and writing, and argument development.

2nd Year Epistemology and Formal Logic

2009: Five groups; 2010: Ten groups

Tutorial teaching to supplement lectures, focused on practicing basic formal logic and understanding different ‘ways of reasoning’, looking, for example, to scholars such as Hume.

3rd year Jurisprudence

2010: Four groups

Tutorial teaching to supplement lectures encouraging law students to consider the philosophical approach. Topics including traditional jurisprudence debates between Hart and Dworkin as well as problem solving issues such as organ trafficking.

3rd year Philosophy: Two weeks on Citizenship (Approx. 20 students)

Contributing to the main lecturing of this course for two weeks for a discussion of contemporary issues of citizenship.

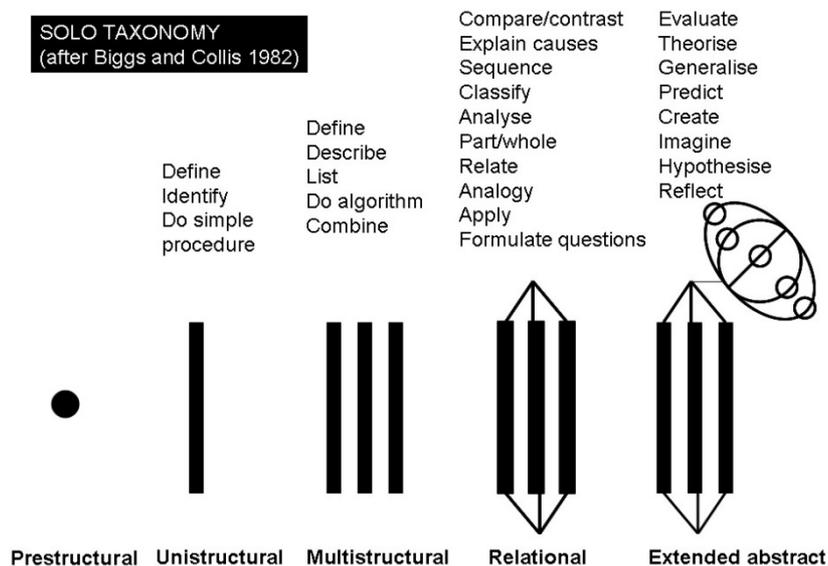
Statement of Teaching Philosophy and Experience

I have had the privilege to teach in diverse circumstances, both at the University of Oxford and the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. My experience therefore ranges from one-on-one tutorials to being a part of a team tutoring medium sized groups within a class of four hundred. These different circumstances require different approaches but are underpinned by one teaching philosophy. My teaching philosophy is based on what Toohy (1999:55-59) terms the ‘cognitive approach’ to learning. The cognitive approach focuses on allowing students to develop their intellectual capacities and an understanding of the way of thinking a field requires. The emphasis is on learning to reason carefully and thoroughly toward persuasive arguments, as well as being able to critically analyse arguments within others’ work. At the same time, another central aim of my teaching is to encourage students to be open to engaging with new ideas and self-reflection on their own positions. This methodology suits the field of political theory, as, at its heart, philosophy is about thinking logically, clearly and with an open mind. My teaching philosophy is therefore not to view teaching as the passing on of knowledge but rather as the development of skills and igniting or fuelling a passion for learning. While a teacher is not the sole influence in the success of a student, research suggests that the teacher accounts for 30% of the variance in student achievement, the largest outside of the student themselves (Hattie 2002:2). I therefore take my task as a teacher very seriously; as Hattie suggests in his discussion of expert teachers, ‘It is what teachers know, do, and care about which is very powerful in this learning equation’ (Hattie 2002:2). In what follows I will detail some of my teaching experience and development to provide some insight into what I, as a teacher, ‘know, do, and care about’.

The University of Oxford: 2014

My most recent teaching experience has been in the Oxford tutorial system. Moore suggests that there are three cardinal principals of the tutorial: “catering for the individual, the co-operation between tutor and student and a particular view of knowledge”, that is, that knowledge is contested (in Ashwin 2005). The key aim of the tutorial is to facilitate the student’s development of the skills of philosophical thinking: this requires being able to gauge their understanding and ability and based on this assessment to provide the correct balance of support in understanding and challenge in developing their own view. The focus, particularly in contemporary analytical political theory is not so much to ensure they know all or large amounts of the relevant literature but rather that they understand the central puzzles and issues of the topic and are able to form and defend a view on these questions. When it comes to historical political thought the approach is somewhat different. One of the key components of the study of scholars such as Hobbes or Locke is to be able to develop a way of understanding their arguments before critiquing. These tutorials thus aim to help students to construct a charitable interpretation of the view or to adjudicate between interpretations before moving toward critiquing the arguments. In both cases, however, the aim is to encourage the student to not only understand the existing debate but to develop their own position through reasoned argument.

The central component of the tutorial system is the essay that students are required to submit each week before their tutorial. This essay forms the basis of the discussion within the tutorial as well as an opportunity for the student to attempt to develop their position. I consider feedback on these essays to be a particularly important aspect of ensuring a student's progress, a view which has been supported by Hattie's finding that of possible influence on students' success, feedback is the most powerful, above even the students' prior cognitive ability (2002:4). As such, I dedicate time both before and after the tutorial to reading through the essay and commenting on the style and content of the arguments. I aim to both correct misunderstanding or unsubstantiated claims and to suggest ways to extend and improve upon good aspects of their work. I also request that my students submit a cover sheet which encourages them to reflect carefully on what the question is asking and how they have attempted to answer it. This information assists me in gauging their own perception of their performance and their understanding of what is required of them, which can be informative in identifying weaknesses: for example, a different approach is needed when a student can self-identify a weakness as opposed to a student who is unaware of their failure to meet a certain requirement. In the former, feedback would be focused on examples and suggestions to help improve on that issue, for example essay structure, whereas the other case would first require prompting in understanding what is missing or problematic in the current structure. The essay process is often very rewarding as the progress of a student can be illustrated as they move from essays that struggling to identify the key issues or disputes to carefully developed arguments in response to the question. I have found the Biggs SOLO Taxonomy helpful to map and evaluate this progress: moving from identifying and describing toward explaining and evaluating.



The University of KwaZulu-Natal: 2009-2010

My experience in tutoring at University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) differs in two important respects. Firstly, the groups were much bigger in size (approx. 15-25 students) and secondly, the students were often underprepared for the university experience, predominately facing challenges of being first generation university attendees (within their families), and in the process of acquiring academic English skills. Bigger class size makes it difficult to focus on the

requirements of an individual student and so learning to best adapt to the needs of the group as a whole was an important skill that I developed during this time. One tool that I found particularly useful was to get the group to discuss a question in pairs, then a small group of four or five and then to report back to the class. During this time I would be able to walk around and listen in or comment on discussions and ensure that all students were engaging with the question. I found this tiered discussion to be useful to encourage even the quietest students to participate and to build up the students' confidence through peer support.

During 2010 I joined a project within UKZN which focused on skills development in the first year introduction to philosophy course. These tutorials focused on basic skills required for university level philosophy such as time management, note-taking, academic reading and writing, and argument development. These students were often very underprepared for tertiary education and so it was a rewarding experience to work toward equipping them with the tools required for success. I found that this project required a particular kind of sensitivity to ensure that students did not feel patronized but rather supported and so encouraged to put in the extra work required.

In 2010 I also had an opportunity to teach two weeks of a 3rd year module. These two weeks were on citizenship which is a central part of my research interests. It is a great joy to teach on a subject of particular interest and in which I have a greater depth of knowledge. It was also however a good experience to learn how to ensure that I was able to clearly articulate the issues to students who were engaging with them for the first time, and to identify the relevant material required to do so. This skill has been transferable to my experience in Oxford, particularly in preparing reading lists for students. I have found that it takes time to develop a list of readings that provide a good introduction to the material as well as a balanced view of the available positions. While it is good to introduce more challenging material, it is most useful when following more introductory material. The order of the reading list is therefore important and students are encouraged to read in the order given.

Into the future

While I am a keen researcher in political theory, I believe that one of the key skills that political theorists can offer is to teach others to think clearly and logically about politics. I am therefore passionate about the value of teaching and hope to dedicate significant time to educating toward this skill in South Africa during my future academic career. As a teacher it is however important to be aware that there is always much to be learnt and many ways to develop and adapt one's teaching. This has been especially evident through participating in Oxford's Development of Learning and Teaching (DLT) seminar series and gaining accreditation with the UK Higher Education Academy. The seminar covered topics such as student feedback, evaluation, student development and emotion in the classroom. It was an excellent learning experience to discuss these issues with an experienced facilitator as well as my peers. During my time as a Max Weber Fellow at the European University Institute, I have built on this foundation through participating in the teaching certificate course. This course included sessions on course-design, supervision, and teaching in diverse contexts. It also had multiple opportunities for feedback, including a micro-teaching workshop and an exchange experience teaching politics undergraduate students at the University of Pompeu Fabra. There is much that we learn

‘on the job’, but it has been incredibly helpful to be able to ground these lessons in a more solid framework and understanding of pedagogy.

Conclusion

While I thoroughly enjoy the challenge and the engagement of teaching talented students, I am often most drawn to providing the required support for students who find the material more challenging. It is a great motivation, for example, to witness the moments when students who have had very little understanding of a piece of formal logic, finally make sense of it. Or to watch students grow in confidence and so ability to develop their thinking.

These experiences remind me of the first encounters I had with teaching and learning as a debating coach which formed the foundation of my passion for teaching. I coached debating to school students aged between 12-18 between 2006 and 2010 at individual schools and in the provincial open and development teams. Although in many ways different to teaching university level political theory, it too was a task in teaching critical thinking and reaped the same rewards of watching a student develop their own mind: to grow in confidence and competence in understanding of material they encounter and offering analysis and insight into the issues. I found this work to be incredibly enjoyable, stimulating, and worthwhile and look forward to continuing to participate in the project of teaching critical thinking throughout my academic career.

List of Works Cited

Ashwin, Paul. (2005). *Variation in Students’ Experiences of the ‘Oxford Tutorial’*. Higher Education. Vol. 50, No. 4, pp. 631 – 644

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Toohey, Susan. (1999). *Designing Courses for Higher Education*. Open University Press: Philadelphia.