

CLUSTER 2 COMMENTARY

STEPPING STONES IN A LEARNING JOURNEY AS UNIVERSITY TEACHER

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The chapters showcase and analyse two different ways to support student learning of research methods. Rapošová designs a step-by-step process to help students learn how to write a good research proposal in sociology and Fridrichová introduces a flipped classroom activity so that students can learn theory from pre-session readings instead of frontal lecturing, in international relations. The common theme in these chapters is to encourage students' active learning, not for its own sake, but in relation to identified subject-specific pedagogical challenges and learning thresholds in their courses. The papers are excellent, contextualised examples of how, by relatively small means, and in single sessions within a course, students can be supported towards high quality learning. Perhaps for future references the authors might want to look at what David Kolb (1984) has described as main parts of a process of *experiential learning*: concrete experiences – reflections and observations – abstract theorisation – planning in an iterative learning cycle. It seems to me that there are many similarities between the authors' experiences and Kolb's model. It also seems to me that this is what the two authors themselves have engaged in, by engaging in their teaching innovations and evaluating them. Learning is a process and a journey, also for academics.

Both authors have made explicit how they planned, implemented and evaluated their innovations. The chapters are underpinned by relevant literature, so that their motives and arguments for doing what they did is properly theorized and convincingly argued. It is striking how the authors are very thorough in their description of what they wanted to achieve, how and why they did what they did, as well as the attention they have paid to a careful and deep evaluation.

In particular, these two innovations are evaluated through several sources: not only by student evaluations, which is of course important, but also through assessing the quality of students' actual learning – the result of the teaching innovation. These two – student evaluation and learning outcomes – always have to be paired in order to properly evaluate what actually happens when an innovation is introduced. Furthermore, Rapošová used documented personal reflections during the innovation as a basis for reflective evaluation and Fridrichová used classroom observers as a third evaluation source. These sources add even more to the credibility of the evaluation. Thereby these two chapters are excellent examples of the *scholarship of teaching and learning* (Boyer 1990; Chick 2018; Kreber 2002). As early career academics it is admirable to have learnt and adopted such an approach already, and as organisers of courses, this is something educational developers can encourage.

The two authors also reflect upon their own teaching environment, their departmental culture in relation to teaching. Basically, they both seem to have a quite supportive, open-minded local col-

legal context, where innovations are if not actively promoted then at least not actively hindered either. Fridrichová mentions how her innovation breaks the traditional lecture-style teaching in her department, but also that her departmental leader is supportive. It would have been interesting to read how these two innovations have been received in the department. Do the departmental colleagues know about this innovation? How have they reacted? Have the ideas spread to other sessions in the same courses, or even to other courses? Could Rapošová and Fridrichová perhaps give a seminar in their departments to talk about their innovations? Or have colleagues in their department been asked to read these excellent papers? The latter is a potentially powerful strategy to use in a course for early career academics: to ask participants to identify one or more 'critical friends' (Handal 1999) in their own department who might read and comment on the report of the innovation. Thereby even stronger links can be built (Mårtensson 2014) between ideas and initiatives developed in a course, and the local context in which the academics live their professional lives.

References

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