

“Infusing global perspectives through the curriculum”

Faculty development Workshop at Mount Mary College

Post-workshop reflections, responses to questions & resources.

Peter Taylor, 9 July 2004 (with additions 3 Oct. 2004)

Themes for teaching global perspectives

My initial themes:

1. embrace difference
2. grapple with dynamics of embeddedness [within dynamics at a larger scale/scope in time and space]
3. engage* with 1 & 2 in ways that enhance the ability of others to engage with 1, 2 & 3

Additional themes added by participants during workshop:

Related to #1 & 3 --

multiple points of view

sensitivity to perspective

expose hidden diversity; find ways to hear what is underneath

multiple approaches to teacher-student & student-student interaction

lessons from the margins/periphery

address conflicting angles/"truths," and tensions among them

Related to #2 --

systematic/analytic thinking

fluid movement from local to larger scope & connections

biosphere stewardship

keep abreast of change

* engagement = deliberate involvement in a *situation* in ways that presume that others will also take an active role and that the *situation* cannot be understood or managed from an outside vantage point. Engaging implies a more participatory spirit than intervening. [From Taylor, P. J. (2005). Unruly Complexity: Ecology, Interpretation, Engagement. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.]

Additional resources

Collection of syllabi on teaching global environmental issues (compiled by Mike Maniates, Allegheny College)

<http://webpub.alleg.edu/employee/m/mmaniate/GepEd/gepedold.html>

See section of Maniates' home page on enhancing students' "civic capabilities" (through local action)

<http://webpub.allegheeny.edu/employee/m/mmaniate/es/maniates.htm>

See intro to Maniates' anthology on teaching global environmental issues where Maniates' addresses the fact that students can get disempowered by finding out how bad things are.

<http://www.rowmanlittlefield.com/Chapters/Index.shtml?SKU=0847695417&Site=rowmanlittlefield&Title=Encountering%20Global%20Environmental%20Politics&FileType=HTML>

Chris Young, Alverno College, chris.young@alverno.edu

"Becoming a global citizen" is one strand of Alverno's curriculum, which Chris Young addresses in environmental science courses, see http://www.alverno.edu/academics/environment_science.html

He's local and a very helpful guy.

Vision of sustainability education

<http://www.cct.umb.edu/efsvision.html>

<http://www.cct.umb.edu/efsgamission.html>

Question from Toni Wulff to Peter Taylor: What is your approach to teaching global perspectives?

This is still a work-in-progress for me. I'm working on the three fronts below – but note the tensions and the open questions at the end, which also motivate my ongoing pedagogical experimentation.

1st. front. Activities that introduce/motivate critical tensions/heuristics/themes

I present situations or scenarios that are readily communicated yet, at the same time, point to the complexity is moved to the background in the attempt to communicate to others. For example, I often run a classroom simulation involving population growth in two islands--one with equal distribution of resources; the other with three unequal social classes. The theme or heuristic that emerges is that the analysis of causes and their implications can qualitatively change if equal units (of population) are replaced by unequal units (social classes) interconnected through various social, political, and economic dynamics. Such critical tensions or heuristics are intended to have broad application and open up important questions yet not require everyone to deal with particular cases whose detail only a specialists could absorb.

Another class activity involves the so-called tragedy of the commons.

Taylor, P. J. (2003). "Non-standard lessons from the "tragedy of the commons"," in M. Maniates (Ed.), Encountering Global Environmental Politics: Teaching, Learning, and Empowering Knowledge. Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 87-105. http://www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/99d.doc

Excerpt (some of which won't make sense without reading about the class simulation earlier in the essay)

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE, AND SOCIETY

Student engagement is key to my approach to teaching. Personally I favor the non-standard alternatives, but I do not dictate those positions. Instead, I use activities, such as the extended tragedy simulation, so that students participate in discovering such alternatives themselves. When I summarize what transpired in the terms described in this essay, I hope to provide themes for their ongoing questioning in other contexts or into more advanced classes.

This essay cannot, of course, replicate the full experience of interactions in a class simulation or seminar discussions...

In a sense subscribed to by all teachers, critical thinking means that students are bright and engaged, ask questions, and think about the course materials until they understand well established knowledge and competing approaches. This becomes more significant when students develop their own processes of active inquiry, which they can employ in new situations, beyond the bounds of our particular classes, indeed, beyond their time as students. My sense of critical thinking is, however, more specific; it depends on inquiry being informed by a strong sense of how things could be otherwise. I want students to see that they understand things better when they have placed established facts, theories, and practices in tension with alternatives. [1] Critical thinking at this level should not depend on students rejecting conventional accounts, but they do have to move through uncertainty. Their knowledge is, at least for a time, destabilized; what has been established cannot be taken for granted. Students can no longer expect that if they just wait long enough the teacher will provide complete and tidy conclusions; instead they have to take a great deal of responsibility for their own learning. Anxieties inevitably arise for students when they have to respond to new situations knowing that the teacher will not act as the final arbiter of their success. A high level of critical thinking is possible when students explore such anxieties and gain the confidence to face uncertainty and ambiguity (Taylor 2001).

My research and teaching connects environmental studies and studies of science and technology in their social context. Over the last decade I have had the opportunity to focus my teaching on critical thinking. Unlike many other colleagues teaching environmental studies, I have not felt the pressure to cover all the facts, issues, or established analyses that students must know. The challenges are somewhat different. An emphasis on critical thinking implies, even in large classes, an individualized model of teacher-student interaction, and students' corresponding raised expectations are difficult to fulfill. Their responses are sometimes emotionally intense, especially in the case of science students, which makes sense when we recall that their success in science has depended on learning what others already have discovered and systematized.

This has forced me to—in much the same spirit that I expect my students to take more responsibility for their learning—experiment, take risks, and through experience build up a set of tools that work for me. In recent years I have made more time to learn from others about writing through the curriculum, designing opportunities for co-operative, experiential, and project-based learning, and fostering students' different learning preferences. To use Kolb's terms, I am gradually making more room for Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, and Active Experimentation, in addition to the Abstract Conceptualization that is my own intellectual inclination (Kolb 1984). The conceptual emphasis remains, however, in the approach to teaching I have introduced in this essay.

A final question left open by this essay concerns the productive role of ambiguity for critical thinking. I mentioned that anxieties inevitably arise for students when they have to respond to new situations knowing that the teacher will not act as the final arbiter of their success. I claimed, moreover, that a high level of critical thinking is possible when students explore such anxieties and gain the confidence to face uncertainty and ambiguity. Yet, because a certain level of confidence is needed to deal with ambiguity, I also realize that I need to present some propositions in which students can be confident. A sense of ambiguity is generated when during the class simulation I disallow students' appeals for me to make or clarify rules and thus withdraw from the role they expect of a teacher. I rein in the ambiguity, however, when I follow the simulation with a presentation of the classification of the four levels in their responses, draw out the lessons, and summarize them in terms of two alternatives.

A similar tension is present overall in this essay. Its relevance was not supposed to be limited to science and policy about the commons. I would advocate the exploration of non-systemness and rhetorical analysis more generally. In environmental politics courses and in socio-environmental research, I think it is important to examine ways that simple models frame our thinking, giving priority to simple principles about individuals over differentiated and complex social dynamics and favoring powerful interests over others. But I have not demonstrated the non-standard lessons apply beyond the case of the commons. I can only hope that readers—students and teachers alike—have been stimulated to experiment, take risks, and through experience weave my approach into their set of tools for working in other areas of science and environmental politics. I suspect that, if I had presented a fully developed analysis of a particular concrete case, readers interested in some other area of the world, the environment, or politics would have skipped the paper. Yet I know that reading such a case would have made some readers more confident about whether and how to employ the non-standard alternatives this essay has introduced. I have to admit that a tension between opening up questions and establishing confidence in answers continues to run through my work (Taylor 2002). So, before reading further, ask yourself what changes you would seek in order to foster critical thinking about environmental politics...

Note:

[1] The image I often use is of a spring, with a standard view and an alternative at its two ends. When the spring is stretched it pulls back; when compressed it pushes out. That is, the standard view cannot be considered without taking the alternative into consideration, and vice versa. Nor can the two of them be collapsed into one concept. I also use the term “critical heuristic.” By heuristic I mean a proposition that stimulates, orients, or guides our inquiries, yet breaks down when applied too widely. Critical heuristics are ones that place established facts, theories, and practices in tension with alternatives. For example: “There will be a qualitative change in the analysis of causes and the implications of the analysis if an emphasis on short-term interest is replaced by a focus on institutions of collective governance.” The alternatives in this essay can be rephrased in this way as critical heuristics.

Other activities related to environment, science and society and biology in its social context are linked to my graduate syllabi

http://www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/640-02.html

http://www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/645-03.html

Paper reflecting on teaching critical thinking, http://www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/journey.html

2nd front. Problem-based learning

See my handouts from workshop, http://www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/mtmary.pdf

Global responsive studies draft syllabus (appended)

3rd front: Developing process skills

Paper reflecting on teaching critical thinking, http://www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/journey.html

Teaching/learning tools, http://www.faculty.umb.edu/peter_taylor/tools.html (let me know if you are interested in some of the items listed that aren't completed)

Theme: Reflection in journals is valuable in providing students with a form of self-evaluation that leads them to more self-directed learning and in informing teachers of hidden diversity etc.

But note these Tensions

Each side below has value and challenges the other side. I think such tensions are positive.

Tension 1

a. Running activities that introduce/motivate Critical tensions/heuristics/themes that I have already formulated

vs.

b. Problem-based learning (in which students direct their own learning and may not arrive at established, identifiable themes, facts, frameworks, etc.).

Tension 2

a. Problem-based learning on local situations, in which students can really imagine themselves taking the actions they come up with

vs.

b. Problem-based learning on trans-local situations, for which the PBL scenarios have to finesse why students would be getting involved (e.g., plan a series of debates – see my workshop handouts)

Tension 3

a. Structured disciplinary & interdisciplinary frameworks

vs.

b. Identifiable, established science concepts

Tension 4

a. Engagement in activities (both sides of tension 1)

vs.

b. Disciplined content (both sides of tension 3)

Tension 5

a. Process skills for self-directed learning, multi-person collaborations, interdisciplinary inquiry, “embracing difference,” “engaging to enhance engagement.”

vs.

b. Thematic or content lessons re: grappling with dynamics of embeddedness (both sides of tension 4)

Open questions

How best to teach so as to give recognition to diverse learning styles.

How to teach students to step out of one's comfortable position and stand in a different place.

Theme: Arranging to have an assistant/monitor helps keep me taking stock of my teaching and adjusting my efforts.

University of Massachusetts at Boston
Globally Responsive Studies—Section A

Draft Syllabus

Instructors:

Peter Taylor, <peter.taylor@umb.edu, 287-7636, W-2-143-09> Graduate Program in Critical & Creative Thinking, Coordinator of section A, specializing as a resource person in ...

Emmett Schaefer <Emmett.Schaefer@umb.edu> Sociology, resource person in ...

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Peter Kiang <peter.kiang@umb.edu> Teacher Education & Asian-American Studies, resource person in...

Rajini Srikanth <rajini.srikanth@umb.edu> English, resource person in..

Siew Chan <siew.chan@umb.edu> Accounting, resource person in

Office hours: For an hour directly after each session, or by arrangement

Class email list: Emails sent to xx@yahoogroups.com will go to everyone in the course

Class times & location: Tu, Th, xx

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this team-taught, multidisciplinary course students develop knowledge, conceptual frameworks, and skills for lifelong learning about how they can respond to the ways their lives depend on and influence the lives of other people across the globe.

COURSE OVERVIEW and OBJECTIVES

This course begins from the premise that we cannot avoid responding to our “global situation.” This term refers to the fact that:

- every day our lives depend on the fruit of work done by many different people in distant and nearby places under conditions about which we know little; and
- the decisions and actions we make affect the lives of many different people in distant and nearby places.

The question you address in the course is “So what?”—or, more exactly, what would you and other students need to know to provide a well-informed, well-reasoned, and practically realistic answer to the question “So what?” The course is not insisting that you take responsibility for the welfare of others. If you believe there is little that you should do or that you can do, that’s OK, but you have to be able to justify your position and understand its implications. And that expectation applies for any position you take.

The “so what” question will be explored in a specific scenario, which will vary from semester to semester. For Fall xx, the scenario concerns clothing produced in sweat shop conditions.

The ultimate product of this course is a Global Situation Guidebook for incoming UMass undergraduates, which will consist of the 500-1000 word “briefings” that you (individually or in small groups) produce to help future students think, educate themselves, and act in response to our global situation.

The process towards this product will be based on “Problem-based learning” (PBL) in which you brainstorm so as to identify a range of problems related to the scenario and choose which of these you want to investigate and prepare briefings on. There is no predetermined idea of what issues must be covered in your briefings. Your problem-definitions may evolve as you investigate and exchange findings with other students.

Your PBL work will be stimulated by sessions in which the course instructors introduce you to tools for thinking, research, and activism. These instructors will then serve as resource people where called on by students in light of the problems they have chosen to investigate. The goal is that students leave the course with motivation, experience, skills in using new tools that help you to continue to learn and become more competent as you respond to your changing global through the rest of your lives.

ASSESSMENT & REQUIREMENTS

This will be based on:

- attendance and active participation in classes (25%)
- completion of worksheets from the class sessions and any homework exercises (15%)
- journal entries (that reflect on the development of your thinking and work during the course) (10%)
- weekly emails to xx@yahoogroups.com (that contribute to building a community of learning and support during the course) (10%)
- interim presentations and reports during the semester (15%)
- Course project briefing(s) (presentation, draft, and final version revised in response to draft) (25%)

ACCOMMODATIONS: Sections 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 offer guidelines for curriculum modifications and adaptations for students with documented disabilities. If applicable, students may obtain adaptation recommendations from the Ross Center (287-7430). The student must present these recommendations to each professor within a reasonable period, preferably by the end of the Drop/ Add period.

Students are advised to retain a copy of this syllabus in personal files for use when applying for certification, licensure, or transfer credit.

This syllabus is subject to change, but workload expectations will not be increased after the semester starts. (Version 15 November 03)

SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS for Section A

1. Movie: "Made in LA." Premise: Our global situation. Discussion of course core question of course: So what?
2. Introduction to Problem-based learning (PBL). Warm-up PBL exercise I: "Planning a series of debates on sweatshops"
3. Warm-up PBL exercise II: KNF (HYW) and other tools [full faculty participates]
4. (Re)introduction to resources of the library (in Healey Library instructional room, 4th floor)
5. Warm-up PBL exercise III: Mini-presentations
- 6-12. Introduction to faculty as resources
13. Course project PBL: KNF (HYW) and other tools [full faculty participates]
14. Course project PBL: Formation of small groups and task definition
15. Library research on tasks
16. Report-back on tasks in small groups. Reformulation of tasks and, if needed, of some groups
17. Library and other research on tasks
18. Mini-reports to class. Establish or revise inter-group communication & co-ordination
19. Review of PBL process to date [full faculty participates]
20. Film or Guest speaker
21. Report-back on tasks in small groups & Preparation for presentations
22. Film or Guest speaker
- 23 & 24. Public presentations of briefings [full faculty participates]
25. Taking stock: Where have we come & where are we going?
26. Taking stock II: Where are we going? (cont.) & Course evaluations

RESOURCES

Globalization

Sweat shops

http://dmoz.org/Society/Issues/Business/Human_Rights/Sweatshops/
"Made in LA" Movie, <http://www.madeinla.com/>

Problem-based learning

Greenwald, N. (2000). "Learning from Problems." The Science Teacher 67(April): 28-32.

Greenwald, N. (2000). Science in Progress: Challenges in Problem-based Learning for Secondary Schools. (email nlgreenwald@comcast.net to purchase copy)

University of Delaware, "Problem-based learning Clearinghouse," <https://www.mis4.udel.edu/Pbl/>
(viewed 21 June '02)

University of Delaware, "Other Problem-Based Learning or Related Sites,"
<http://www.udel.edu/pbl/others.html> (viewed 6 Nov. '01)

Woods, D. R. (Ed.) (1980-). PS News: A Sharing of Ideas about Problem Solving. Hamilton, Ontario: McMaster University, Department of Mechanical Engineering.

Woods, D. R. (1994). Problem-based Learning: How to Gain the Most from PBL. Waterdown, Ontario: D. R. Woods.

