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Before and after: reflections on changes in teaching practice and lessons learnt after taking the University pedagogic training course basis module 1.

1 Introduction

There is a growing realization that it is important for University lecturers to have pedagogic training and this has led to an increase in available training courses in the past years (Rust, 2002; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004). The focus on improving teaching has come from the understanding that in order for student learning to improve teaching has to be done in a way that facilitates improved learning and retention (Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin & Prosser, 2000). Prosser, Trigwell and Taylor (1994) identified two main types of teaching approaches: the teacher focused approach and the student focused approach and classified them into the following five categories:

"Approach A: A teacher-focused strategy with the intention of transmitting information to students;
Approach B: A teacher-focused strategy with the intention that students acquire the concepts of the discipline;
Approach C: A teacher/student interaction strategy with the intention that students acquire the concepts of the discipline;
Approach D: A student-focused strategy aimed at students developing their conceptions;
Approach E: A student-focused strategy aimed at students changing their conceptions." (Prosser et al., 1994).

The majority of traditional teaching methods fall under approaches A and B. There has now been a shift in pedagogic thinking at University level that approaches C, D and E are more beneficial to student learning. With approach E being the ideal teaching strategy (Biggs & Tang, 2010). Approach E is in line with outcomes based teaching and learning which focuses on what the student is going to learn and what they will do with what they have learnt rather than on what the teacher is going to teach (Biggs & Tang, 2010). The concept of constructive alignment is one example of outcomes based teaching and learning, it starts by 'clearly stating, not what the teacher is going to teach, but what the outcome of that teaching is intended to be' (Biggs & Tang, 2010:1). Constructive alignment is defined as having two aspects (Biggs, 2003):

"Constructive alignment' has two aspects. The 'constructive' aspect refers to the idea that students *construct meaning* through relevant learning activities. That is, meaning is not something imparted or transmitted from teacher to learner, but is something learners have to create for themselves. Teaching is simply a catalyst for learning... The 'alignment' aspect refers to what the teacher does, which is to set up a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes. The key is that the components in the teaching system, especially the teaching methods used and the assessment tasks, are *aligned* with the learning activities assumed in the intended outcomes. The learner is in a sense 'trapped', and finds it difficult to escape without learning what he or she is intended to learn.' (Biggs, 2003: 2)

Constructive alignment has four main steps that should be taken into consideration: one should define the intended outcomes of the teaching, one should select teaching and learning activities that will lead to these outcomes, one should assess what the students have learnt to see if the original outcomes were achieved and finally, one should arrive at a final grade (Biggs, 2003).

Before embarking on the University pedagogic training course (UPED) my teaching focused on transmitting knowledge to students. This was due to a lack of pedagogic education and understanding of what it means to teach students. I predominantly focused on myself as the lecturer and the information that I wanted to transmit. This essay will therefore be a reflective piece based on my experiences before undertaking the first part of the University pedagogic training (UPED) course and my experiences after taking the course – a small experimental project. I will begin by presenting my experiences before taking the University pedagogic course, I will then present my experience of the course, I will introduce the small experimental project I undertook as part of the course, and I will conclude with by discussing the results of this project in relation to the concept of outcome based teaching/learning and with particular reference to constructive alignment. This essay should thus be seen as a reflective piece based on my personal experience and I hope it will have some resonance with other pedagogic students and give useful feedback to those who ‘teach teachers how to teach’.

1.1 Before the training

My motivation to enrol in the UPED course, was twofold: firstly, to improve my teaching skills as I was aware on my own inadequacy as a lecturer; and secondly, to acquire the pedagogic certificate which would boost my CV and in the long run increase my chances of getting a permanent job at the University. Most of my teaching-related experience was related to conferences presentations – i.e. presenting to audiences of my peers. When I began my job as a lecturer I quickly realized that teaching students was not the same as giving a conference presentation, but I was unsure of how to improve my teaching skills. My own experience of University lectures was variable; I knew that I enjoyed and retained information best when the lecturer was engaged, seemed to enjoy their subject, used humour, presented the information in simple and clear language, and provided interesting and relevant examples. I tried to emulate this in my teaching and my success was mixed because my focus was all wrong.

1.2 During the training

During the first part of the basis module on the UPED course I began to understand what I was doing wrong as a lecturer. Some of the concepts that I had been exposed to in my work but had not really understood the importance of, for example learning goals, were clarified. Two key things made a strong impact on me: the importance of learning goals and of student focused teaching. In our programme there were various learning goals for the courses and the students often mentioned them, but I had no real understanding of their aim or usefulness. During the UPED course I learnt the importance of learning goals and how they would help me to focus on what I wanted the students to learn from my lectures. I had assumed that this was what I had been doing but during the course I realized that I had mostly focused on off-loading information onto them that I thought they needed to know and expecting them to process it. I was aware of the limitations of my methods and dissatisfied with them as I had experienced and observed good teaching, but I was not sure how to improve my practice. During our practical sessions in the course I had also observed how my colleagues used the blackboard instead of only using PowerPoint presentations – and was impressed by the difference this made and how using the board enhanced interaction.

1.3 Project

I therefore embarked on a small project to test out my new knowledge and to apply the two things I had newly learned – learning objectives and student focused teaching. The week after I took the course I was going to lead a seminar with students from my programme on qualitative data analysis. This was not a teaching year on our programme as the students were writing their master theses, and we only had a couple of seminars a year with the students. I decided to use one of these seminars to try out the new techniques I had learnt.

Thus the aims of my project were 1) to apply two new skills I had recently acquired – writing learning objectives and using a student focused teaching strategy – in my preparation and teaching for the seminar; 2) To assess the effectiveness of applying these skills using feedback from the students.

2 Method

2.1 Sample

The project took place at the University of Bergen during the autumn semester. There were 8 women students who were all at early stages in their master thesis. Half of them had started collecting data and some had started transcribing data and were not far from embarking on data analysis. The other half did not yet have data to analyse, so the group was mixed. None of them had any real experience with qualitative data analysis – one student said she had done something but it was at a very basic level as part of someone else's project. This was the first time any of them were analysing a substantial amount of data they had collected for their own project. So it was important that the presentation should be pitched at an introductory level and that all concepts should be explained clearly. I had contact with all the students as I had given them several lectures during the spring semester; I supervise some of the students on their master thesis. Apart from lectures, I had contact with some of them as the facilitator in their Problem Based Learning (PBL) group and also as a facilitator in group work conducted in the autumn 2013 semester when they had started on the master programme.

2.2 Teaching instruments and process

In my planning I began by thinking through the learning objectives of my seminar – what did the students need to learn? I developed two learning objective using L. Dee Fink (2003) and the Learning Resources Unit (1996)'s papers as my guides.

Therefore, my learning objectives were:

by the end of this seminar the students should be able to:

- describe the purpose of qualitative data analysis
- discuss the various ways to conduct qualitative data analysis
- demonstrate the steps used in thematic analysis
- practice applying thematic analysis on data during class

These, along with my presentation of the day's teaching plan helped them to see what to expect from the seminar.

I also used three types of teaching AIDS, I began by giving a PowerPoint presentation since I needed to present the information on what qualitative data analysis was i.e. provide them with the theory. After presenting the theoretical concepts, I then described step by step how to use one specific data analysis method. I concluded the first part of the seminar with a presentation of a real life example of how I had analysed my data during my research, to help make the abstract concepts I had introduced to them more tangible.

In the second part of the seminar, I put them into 3 groups presented them with a research question and 4 short related texts from newspapers. I asked them to code the texts and come up with codes and themes using the thematic analysis as I knew that all of them planned to use this method in their own work. They had half an hour of coding and then we regrouped to discuss the codes and themes they had developed. I wrote up their codes and themes on the board as we discussed and this helped everyone to see what the others had come up and to get a clearer idea of the process involved in analysing data. It also worked well as an interactive experience between me as the teacher, the students and the information I was writing on the board.

I had told the students at the beginning of the seminar that I was taking the UPED course and wanted their feedback on my teaching practice at the end of the seminar – both positive and negative - as part of my project and to help improve my teaching practice. I also told them to keep in mind the previous lectures I had given them and see if there was any difference to my mode of teaching now after the course. I asked them to give me oral feedback after the seminar and that I would also appreciate written feedback via email.

3 Results

This section will present the results from the project. I will start by describing my sample. I will then present the results from the oral feedback they gave me directly after the lecture and will conclude with a presentation of the written comments they sent via email.

As I mentioned in section 2.2, I had varying degrees of contact with the students before the seminar. I am one of the two members of staff responsible for the master programme so they had all had frequent contact with me during the spring semester. However, apart from the lecture time, their contact with me varied. Table 1 below shows how much contact I had each student to give an idea of how well they knew me and how comfortable they were communicating with me.

Table 1. Level of previous contact with students

Student	Gave written feedback via email	Gave oral feedback after lecture	1 st supervisor	2 nd supervisor	PBL	Group work Autumn 2013
AE	No	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	No
CN	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
LM	Yes	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	No
KS	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
MM	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
ST	No	Yes	Yes	n/a	Yes	Yes

TI	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
UL	Yes	Yes	No	n/a	No	No
8	5	8	4	3	4	2

As mentioned in section 2.1 there were eight students altogether in this group – all were using qualitative methodology in their master theses. The students were all women. None of them had previous experience with analysing qualitative data. I had known two of the students since autumn 2013 when I had been one of the facilitators in their group work. I met the rest of the students in the Spring semester 2014 when they started taking lectures in our department. Four of the students were in my (PBL) group. I am also the main supervisor for four of the students and the second supervisor for three students - although my supervisory role with those three has so far been limited. All the students gave oral feedback after the lecture but only five emailed me with written feedback. I asked for written feedback to give them a chance to further reflect on the lecture and to make it easier to give more critical feedback which they may have felt uncomfortable telling me directly.

3.1 Oral feedback

At the end of the seminar I asked the students for feedback. I emphasized that this feedback should be both positive and negative as it was important for me to know where I should improve my teaching. They all had something to say and to my surprise it was all positive. The students said they appreciated having the learning outcomes as this helped them focus more on what they needed to get out of the seminar. They liked the way I summed up what I had been saying at the end of each section. They all felt that I was more confident compared to previous lectures and my body language was more relaxed I moved around the room more freely instead of staying close to the desk. They reported that there was good dialogue between us and they enjoyed being able to ask questions during the lecture and receiving clear answers. They also said they enjoyed listening to me and that the practical session at the end was useful as they got to practice what I had presented straightaway while it was still fresh.

3.2 Written feedback

I had also told the students that I would appreciate it if they also took the time to send me their comments via email, so I could have the feedback in their own words. I sent them a reminder email after the lecture but only five students responded and they emailed me their comments between 2-7 days after the lecture. Again these comments were largely positive but I also received a couple of more critical comments. I will present these comments under two headings - learning outcomes and student focused teaching - to help show how the students' comments illustrated the two concepts I tried to apply.

3.2.1 Learning outcomes

Taking the time to develop learning outcomes for my lecture helped me to focus on what was important for the students to learn and thus prepare my lecture in such a way as to make the material more accessible to them and also to help the students become more aware of the point of the lecture. The students' responses to this have been categorized under the themes below.

3.2.1.1 Clear learning goals

The students appreciated having clear learning objectives presented to them at the beginning of the lecture. This helped them to focus on what they were expected to get out of the lecture. They also

appreciated how I summarized what I had presented at the end of each section. I had divided the lecture into 3 sections:

'Det var bra at det stod læringsmål i powerpointen og at du hadde med oppsummering etter hvert emne.' (UL)

'Jeg likte også veldig godt at du starter hver time med å si hva vi skal lære, samt oppsummerer dette etterpå.' (MM)

'Jeg vil især trekke frem det at du etter hver leksjon oppsummerte hva du hadde undervist oss i. Selv om det kan virke overflødig, var det likevel med på å samle alt vi hadde gått gjennom, og gjøre det overskuelig igjen.' (LM)

3.2.1.2 Organization of the lecture

I had taken the time to organize the lecture material so that I was building up their knowledge with each section. As they had no previous experience of analysing qualitative data, I began by presenting the theoretical aspects of qualitative data analysis, followed by the aims of data analysis, different styles of data analysis, the process of data analysis. I then presented them with one specific data analysis method in detail and then gave a real life example of how I had conducted data analysis in my PhD research. I concluded the seminar with the practical exercise. This systematic way of presenting the topic seemed to be met with approval by the students:

'Det er lett å se at du forbereder deg godt til undervisning.' (MM)

'I found your lecture very interesting, and your presentation neat, tidy and clear.' (TI)

'Undervisningen var veldig oversiktlig.' (LM)

'God organisering av fôrelesing med teori i byringa og praktisk oppgåve på slutten... Faglærar la opp stoffet på ein organisert og tydeleg måte.' (CN)

3.2.1.3 Presentation

Besides how the lecture was organised it was also important how I presented the material. Previously I had felt very nervous and felt I lacked confidence during the lecture because I did not feel I had a strong grasp of the subject. The change of focus being on the students rather than myself helped me to stay focused on what was important for the students, instead of thinking about how well I was coming across as a lecturer. This helped me to prepare the lecture in a different way as witnessed by the students:

'Du formulerer deg på en enkel og veldig forståelig måte.' (UL)

'Du snakker klart og tydelig. Du klarer å gjøre komplisert fagstoff lett forståelig.' (MM)

'You are secure in the role you are having as a presenter, and it is obvious that you know your material well, visible through the way you communicate your material with your own wording, trying to find the best words to formulate the true meaning of what you want us to understand. You seem to thrive in the role as a teacher, which is always a big advantage for the students as well as yourself, in my opinion.' (TI)

Presentation was where one of the students came out with a more critical comment and pointed out something that I can work to improve:

'Sometimes, when you have incredibly much to communicate, you have a tendency to speak faster and faster, and kind of "swallow" your words at the end ... so that would be the one area where I can pinpoint anything to improve.' (TI)

3.2.2 Student focused teaching

The focus on what students should learn and what I could do to facilitate this was my other focus in this exercise and I used various strategies to help me achieve this. I was open to their questions during the lecture so there was constant interaction between me and them and I used a lecture and a practical exercise to help them apply what they had learnt about the topic.

3.2.2.1 Interaction during the lecture

I had told the students that I wanted the lecture to be as interactive as possible and not just one way delivery of information from me. I told them ask to questions and for clarification during the lecture so we could have ongoing dialogue. I also posed questions to them during the lecture.

'Du var flink til å tillate spørsmål underveis fra klassen og du tar deg tid til å svare alle som lurte på noe, det synes jeg var veldig bra.' (UL)

'Du er kunnskapsrik, men du er også åpen for andres meninger selv om du gjerne er uenig. Du er ekstremt god på feedback til overfor dine studenter!' (MM)

One of the students also pointed out something useful that I could have done better and that could have improved interaction as well as also helped with the understanding of the concepts I presented:

'Hva som kunne vært bedre er vanskelig å si. Evt at du etter hver slide/hvert tema stilte spørsmål til om vi hadde spørsmål til det som var sagt!' (EM)

3.2.2.2 Use of a practical exercise

The practical exercise was a useful way for me to see if the students had understood the concepts that I had presented in the lecture. Additionally, it was an opportunity for them to practice applying what they had learnt in a concrete way so they could begin to see exactly what was involved in analyzing qualitative data. They seemed to find this exercise useful:

'Det var nyttig med en praktisk oppgave, slik at vi kunne forsøke å anvende det du nettopp hadde lært oss.' (UL)

'De praktiske øvelser var også nyttige. De førte til at nye spørsmål dukket opp underveis, og gjennom øvelsene, fikk jeg svar med en gang. De praktiske øvelser var derved med på å gjøre undervisningen om analyse mer dybdegående og forståelig ved at vi fikk prøvd det selv. Jeg husker nok også bedre hva vi snakket om etter å ha praktisert.' (LM)

'Å ha ei praktisk oppgåve gjorde det enklare for meg å forstå kva analyse av kvalitativ data går ut på.'

(CN)

These results and the use of the feedback I received from the students via email, provide an illustration of how they assessed my performance as well as how I implemented the concepts that I had learnt during the UPED course.

4 Discussion

This paper presents an experimental project I conducted as part of my UPED course where I used a day seminar with a small group of master students to apply some of the concepts that I had learnt during the first part of the course. The overarching guide of my project was the concept of constructive alignment, an outcomes based teaching /learning approach (Biggs, 2003). Using the ideas of constructive alignment, I focused on applying two of the concepts that had made a strong impression on me during the course – developing learning objectives and applying student focused teaching. I used the feedback from the students on my teaching as assessment of whether I had managed to successfully implement these two concepts. In this section I will discuss the implications of my findings in relation to constructive alignment (Biggs, 1999).

As mentioned in the introduction, constructive alignments has four main steps that should be taken into consideration when implementing it. I will discuss my project in relation to three of the steps: defining intended outcomes, selecting appropriate teaching and learning activities and assessing whether the original outcomes were achieved (Biggs, 2003). I will not include the fourth as it was not possible to grade my students since this was a support seminar for their master thesis. The long term assessment of the seminar will be related to their thesis results when the examiners assess whether they conducted a good enough analysis of their data. My seminar was only the beginning of a long term process.

4.1 Defining intended outcomes

Biggs (2003) states that it is important to let students know what we expect of them and what kind of knowledge they should acquire. He writes that we should not require students to acquire knowledge so that they can regurgitate it, but so that they can actively use it in their future education or careers (Biggs, 2003). Thus it is important that the outcomes at the beginning of a course are defined to reflect this.

In my project I did not have a lot of time to plan thoroughly as I had limited teaching during the year. Thus, I took advantage of the chance to experiment with these concepts and apply them, at the few teaching opportunities I had which came a week after the UPED course. I did not have enough time to read through all the literature suggested during the course but I did have a general grasp of what was required and I largely used Dee Fink (2003)'s instructional development manual, and the Learning Resources Unit (1996)'s publication on writing learning outcomes, to help guide me. There are limitations and weaknesses in my learning objectives and they were very much focused on the single seminar. However, the students appreciated having the learning goals and stated that they were useful and helped to clarify the focus of the seminar. From my perspective taking the time to think about what exactly I wanted the students to learn during the seminar helped me to narrow my focus and limit my presentation to the key concepts I wanted to put across. This was very different from my previous preparation for lectures where I had no clear focus except to think about the topic at hand and I ended up with too much information in too much detail.

4.2 Selecting appropriate teaching and learning methods

Once I had decided on the learning objectives, I now had to think about what were the best ways to get this information across. Teaching and learning activities have traditionally been limited to lectures and tutorials – largely passive ways of learning where students memorize and then repeat what they have been taught (Rust, 2002; Biggs, 2003). Constructive alignment encourages providing teaching activities that are in line with and will encourage the achievement of the learning outcomes (Biggs, 2003). I had mostly presented my lectures using PowerPoint presentations and although I tried to be interactive because of the nature of the content I had prepared, it was not always easy to engage the students. Therefore, this time I used 3 ways to present the material, although I did give a traditional lecture in the beginning this was important to introduce the key concepts to the students as this topic was new to them. I was, however, open to questions and the students and I had a good dialogue throughout as illustrated in section 3.2.2.1. I summed up what I had just presented after each section in the lecture and they found it useful how I summarised the previous ideas before introducing the next ones. I also used a real life case at the end of the lecture – where I illustrated how I had applied the concepts that I had presented to them, in my own research. The most significant part of the seminar was the practical work where they got to practice applying their knowledge by coding and analyse some text. We moved away from the more passive PowerPoint presentation method and they worked in small groups with paper, pens and highlighters. When we regrouped, I used the board to write up the codes and themes they had developed and we discussed how they had come up with the various ideas, and what they meant. They all found this process useful and enjoyable and could now begin to more clearly conceive how the abstract could become more concrete.

4.3 Assessing if the original outcomes have been achieved

This section was the weakest in my project. The assessment I required of the students and which they gave me – was the assessment on my performance. This was useful for me and for them as it made them think of what I was doing and concentrate more on what I was presenting. Their assessment was overall positive. However, what I did not do effectively was try to assess what they had learnt: I did not ask them if they felt the learning objectives had been achieved. At the end of the seminar I should have put up the learning objectives again and gone through them with the students to assess whether they had been met. Nevertheless, all the students signed up for a qualitative data analysis software training course which I organized after the seminar which indicated that they wanted to further enhance their knowledge. In addition, all the students will apply qualitative data analysis to their research data and this will be assessed when they submit their theses for examination. How well they analyse their data will be partly reflected in their final thesis grade. So to some extent I will be able to assess if the original outcomes have been achieved.

The students' assessment of my attempt to apply a more student focused teaching strategy was generally positive and their feedback on not only on the content, but also the presentation and interaction, showed that the time I had taken to plan the seminar according to the principles of student focused outcomes based teaching/learning was worthwhile.

5 Conclusion

In this essay I have presented my reflections of what I learned from my first attempt to apply a student focused teaching strategy based on constructive alignment. This was an extremely enriching

process from me and has encouraged me to take to read through the literature on teaching and assessment and so as to inform my teaching practice in the future.

The positive feedback I received from the students has also helped me to see the value of engaging students more actively in giving more immediate feedback after lectures. This helps them to be more engaged in what is being presented and also helps the lecturer to see what works well and what doesn't, so that the teaching and learning is constantly evolving. My project and planning for the project was done in a very short space of time – one week – so there were limitations to my application of the concepts and how well I prepared and planned for the seminar. However, it was an encouraging start and in the future I will have the opportunity to use that experience to plan a complete course. This experience has been an invaluable and a positive starting point. Taking the UPED course and conducting this project has helped me to see how crucial it is that ALL University lecturers take part in good quality UPED courses. During the duration of their teaching careers lecturers should attend refresher courses to get new ideas to utilize in their practice and maintain motivation and enthusiasm.

6 References

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