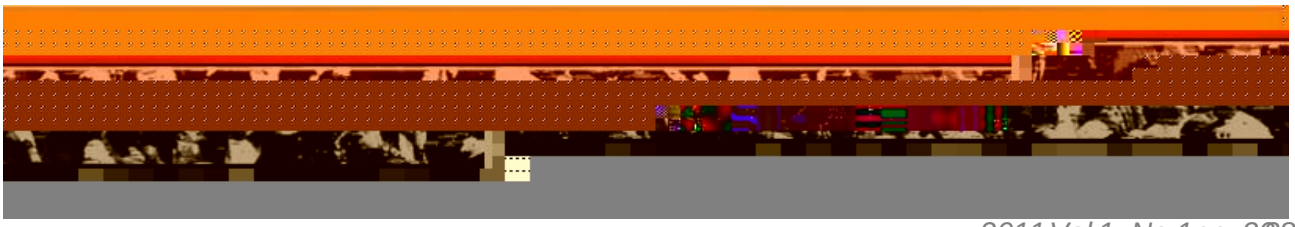

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Teaching Evaluation:

Putting Anthropological Research Skills to Work

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Abstract
In this essay I reflect on the process of teaching evaluation not only as a general theoretical principle, but also as a form of practice. I describe and analyse how I have incorporated evaluation strategies within my first few years of teaching. My views are grounded in my recent experience as an undergraduate tutor at the University of Oxford, as well as my previous professional experience working as a project evaluator and facilitator for arts and media organizations. I begin this essay by detailing my teaching experience, and summarising some of the academic literature relating to teaching evaluation within higher education. Finally, I give examples of how I have used evaluative exercises in not only preparing for, but also conducting and reflecting on tutorials.

Introduction

On entering an institution of higher education, the newly christened instructor could be forgiven for thinking the word 'evaluation' indicates purely an administrative exercise, divorced from the 'real world' of teaching. While feedback forms exhorting students to evaluate instructors by ticking a box are liberally sprinkled through lecture halls, there is often little opportunity to critically consider what the appropriate methods of gaining feedback on one's own teaching are. Wider fears of the 'audit culture' spreading within academia (Strathern 2000, Evans 2004) may, understandably, make some instructors loathe generating quantitative material that can be decontextualised or used without their consultation in wider personnel decisions or to impersonally 'measure performance.' Yet, I argue here, small-scale teaching evaluation conducted through reflexive practice and through qualitative feedback from students can allow for a critical reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of one's own practice and has a fundamentally useful place within academic teaching.

In this essay, I reflect on the process of teaching evaluation not only as a general theoretical principle, but also as a form of practice. I describe and analyse how I have incorporated evaluation strategies within my first few years of teaching. My views are grounded in my previous experience as an undergraduate tutor at the University of Oxford, as well as my professional experience working as a project evaluator and facilitator for media and arts organizations. I begin this essay by detailing my teaching experience, and summarising some of the academic literature relating to teaching evaluation within higher education. Finally, I give examples of how I have used evaluative exercises in not only preparing for, but also conducting and reflecting on tutorials.

Teaching and Evaluation Experience

2008 to 2010, during my doctoral studies at the University of Oxford, I gave small-group tutorials in social anthropology on two interdisciplinary undergraduate degrees: Human Sciences and Archaeology and Anthropology. Each week I set my students (whom I taught in groups from one to three students) a classic anthropological topic that loosely corresponded to the essay questions they were likely to find on their exams at the end of their course. Writing about the Oxford tutorial system, Beck (2007) points out that in externalizing thought through the process of writing an essay, students are forced to confront what they have learned. The process of having to present one's internal knowledge and

understanding of the reading is an opportunity to solidify the scope and nature of what we know. The tutorial is itself a double-edged sword in terms of evaluation, offering at the same time an intensely atomised experience of teaching and learning and significant opportunities for reflection between the student and instructor. As Ashwin (2005) writes, the small size allows you almost immediate access to whether the student is 'getting it,' yet as an instructor there is little opportunity to contextualise the experience with the work of others, or coordinate with other instructors.

Teaching on two interdisciplinary degrees meant that for much of the rest of their week the students were working on material that was often vastly divergent from the material I set for them. On the Human Sciences degree, for example, the students could have been studying biology, geography and demography at any one time, along with social anthropology. This meant as a tutor that extra care had to be taken to ensure that the students were able to make links with other areas of their degree, even if as an anthropologist I was only cursorily familiar with current debates in the biological sciences. While wanting to ensure that each of the students was duly prepared for exams, I also made it a point to have a meeting with the students individually at some point in the term to determine their interests and attempt to assign particularly relevant cross-disciplinary reading in addition to their weekly lists. For instance, one student in 2010 planned on writing her dissertation on the phenomenology of dance. Having had a targeted discussion with her, I was able to assign readings accordingly.

My experience of teaching extends beyond Oxford tutorials. Subsequently I have taught on two Sociology of Media courses at University of Surrey and previously I had given lectures for post-graduate students who attend the Oxford Academy for Documentary Film, focusing on the use of visual methods in research. I also continue to work extensively as an arts education facilitator, tutor and mentor, working with groups of young people to create video and photographic records within non-formal educational environments. During my experience of teaching at the University of Oxford, I actively participated in two dedicated fora within the university for discussing teaching. One of them was the School of Anthropology Graduate Teaching Forum, which specifically discussed the teaching of social anthropology. The other was the Talking Teaching discussion group, which explores a range of educational theory for tutors across the Social Sciences Division. While these diverse teaching experiences undoubtedly contributed to my experience as an undergraduate tutor, in this article, I focus specifically on tutorial teaching, and within that, on the processes of evaluating teaching within tutorials.

In my one and a half years as a tutor at Oxford, my teaching practice changed immeasurably as a result of a combination of inspiring tutorials, awkward mistakes, both spot-on and miscalculated readings, essay marking and discussion, participation in teaching discussion groups and, most of all, through self-reflection and feedback from my students. As part of my teaching experience, I kept brief journal entries after each tutorial, asked my students to fill in mid- and end-of-term quantitative and qualitative evaluation forms, met with each student individually at some point in the term, and incorporated some form of creative evaluation strategy (see below) where possible. The pace of teaching at that stage of my academic career, as well as the small numbers of students who attend tutorials, allowed me greater time and freedom to collect feedback and gather students' viewpoints as qualitative rather than quantitative data. Furthermore, as a doctoral student, I was actively engaged in thinking about the future of my academic career and I was particularly motivated to collect feedback in anticipation of exercises such as teaching portfolios or upcoming job applications.

However, the impetus for collecting material for evaluation extends beyond the desire to enhance my portfolio or orient myself towards the job market. I also had a pre-existing interest in and – dare I say it? – enthusiasm for evaluation grounded in my professional work and research experience doing fieldwork with youth filmmaking initiatives in London. As an anthropologist studying youth filmmaking with a background in arts education, I frequently found that one skill I could bring the organizations that generously allowed me access as a participant-observer to their work, was to assist them with preparing for project reviews and internal and external evaluative exercises. While being careful not to compromise the anonymity of my subjects or the rigor of my research, helping strategize about methods and means of evaluation became a tangible benefit to those groups who had given me their time – and a good use of my skills as an anthropologist. As the result of my research and previous arts education expertise, I also was asked to serve as an independent evaluator for several projects exclusive of my case studies, and I participated in training sessions for arts organizations to develop interactive ways of achieving funders' or others' evaluation requirements.

During my fieldwork and professional experience as an evaluator, I both led and observed a number of different methods of evaluating projects that go far beyond the basic tick-box exercises so vilified by Strathern (2000). Anthropologists long have noted the limitations of large-scale questionnaires as a way of understanding human experience, by pointing out that filling in a response from 1-5 to a closed and sometimes leading question will evince only a partial answer to the partial question asked. While anthropologists often rely on a variety of interactive and creative methodologies in their fieldwork, I have yet to see a decisive move towards applying those methods on institutional levels

to the experience of teaching and learning. In fact, rather than suggesting ideas for more nuanced approaches to evaluation, much of the academic literature and practice seems to follow the lines of Edmundson (1997) in being broadly skeptical of pandering to the culture of 'consumption and entertainment' of contemporary student life by acting as though students are consumers who are 'rating a product' (websites such as www.RateMyProfessor.com only reinforce this sentiment). In the following section, I turn to the academic literature to ground my own experience of teaching self-evaluation within the 'culture' of higher education, as well as in light of the burgeoning focus on 'accountability' within institutions of higher learning (Strathern 2000).

Reflecting on the Literature

The academic literature on teaching assessment and evaluation provides a good foundation for considering one's own practice as an instructor. According to Doyle (1983), forms of student assessment of professors began at Harvard University from the 1920s, when students would share regulated feedback in order to give other students insider knowledge on the teaching style and requirements of certain professors. While students at other universities followed suit (Seldin 1999), assessment of professors was largely a student-led practice until increased emphasis on 'accountability' of the 1980s and 1990s brought greater scrutiny to universities in the name of 'cost effectiveness' (Broadfoot 2000, Shore and Wright 2000).

Academic literature on assessment in higher education is often at pains to put individual practices within the context of institutional arrangements within the university, and the larger context of changing funding priorities and rhetoric at the government level (Shore and Wright 2000). When discussing evaluation on a practical level, Doyle (1983) and Braskamp *et al*(1984) both make clear the central importance of distinguishing between the myriad possible objectives for evaluation. Doyle offers a four-part scheme of some of the ways in which evaluation data is used, ranging from an individual's own use in improving teaching (what I discuss here), to use in making personnel decisions, to helping students select courses, to offering data for research on teaching itself. To a certain extent, evaluation of teaching is also used in the allocation of funding for departments, and as such can be either beneficial or punitive, depending on the results garnered (Shore and Wright 1999).

This diverse list of the possible uses for evaluation data speaks to some of the inherent difficulties in conducting evaluation in an institutional context. Firstly, there are the competing evaluation end-uses. Gregory (1996), for instance, describes the widespread use of questionnaires in universities as a way for students to gain insight on professors, or for personnel decisions to be made. However, he also points out that often the feedback is not given to the tutor him or herself, and as such doesn't fulfill the objective of helping the instructor improve their teaching practice. Secondly, there is the reality not only of multiple demands on academic instructors' lives, but also the fact that many of those who go into academia pursue their careers out of a love for their subject, rather than a desire to achieve maximal 'cost effectiveness' (Ash 1996). For institutions that rely heavily on student feedback, there is growing acknowledgement of the lack of context with which some students may rank teachers (Cashin 1999) as well as the inherent limitations of using student marks as a method of assessment – for instance, Doyle's critique that 'philosophically, it seems unfair to evaluate a person in terms of what other people do or fail to do' (1983: 10).

Other difficulties in evaluation in higher education lie in the overarching criteria with which academics are evaluated. While some personnel decisions are based around teaching, and teaching quality scores are included in overall institutional assessments (see Wright and Shore 1999), by and large many academics are evaluated more on research outputs than on teaching. While ostensibly working in institutions of higher *learning*, a greater degree of emphasis is often placed on the standing of the researcher within their field, rather than their relationship to students. Broadfoot (2000) questions whether this is due to the relative ease of measuring research output, compared with the difficulty of the more intuitive practice of teaching, questioning whether 'what cannot be measured in a systematic way is deemed not to exist'? (2000:199). Ash (1996) notes that this is underlined by the methods of assessment in Research Assessment Exercises (RAEs) versus Teaching Quality Assurance (TQAs). In RAEs, 'the peer review is undertaken by groups of academics who generally are high performers in scholarship and research…When it comes to teaching, I really do not think that one could put one's hand on one's heart and say that the peer review is effected predominately by those colleagues who would be recognised as having achieved the highest performance in the teaching function' (Ash 1996:19). This has direct bearing on the quality of teaching in a department, for, as Gibbs (1996:43) notes, accomplished researchers are not always excellent teachers.

Whatever method of assessment chosen, and whichever criteria evaluated, there remains a larger critique of assessment and evaluation within universities. A number of academics, including Evans (2004), Furedi (2002) and Strathern (2000) have levied substantial critiques at what Furedi describes as the growth of 'bureaucratization' and 'managerialism' in the

British university. For Evans, the 'dark progress' of the 'culture of audit and assessment' (2004:30) was an outgrowth of the increasing emphasis throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s on the university as a corporate structure, one that needed to prove its efficacy and be accountable to its 'stakeholders'. Broadfoot (2000), Strathern (2000) and Shore and Wright (2000) all address the growth of the 'audit culture' in terms of a Foucauldian notion of discursive power, where the increased bureauctratization of academia is not a mundane administrative process but rather a significant shift in academic institutions' and individuals' ability to guard intellectual autonomy. Shore and Wright (2000) describe how the Foucauldian form of power relations in the university requires individual and departmental participants to actively self-regulate – or risk the withdrawal of funding. They discuss how 'audit thus becomes a political technology of the self: a means through which individuals actively and freely regulate their own conduct and thereby contribute to the government's model of social order' (2000:62).

However, while critiquing the conflation of 'the financial and the moral' in the idea of 'accountability' Strathern notes that 'audit is almost impossible to criticise in principle – after all, it advances values that academics generally hold dear, such as responsibility, openness about outcomes and widening of access' (2000: 1-3). The idea of thinking critically about teaching, and using those insights for the different uses outlined above, is therefore not inherently a practice which seeks to limit academic freedom. But Furedi (2002) questions whether the increase in administrative effort needed to complete evaluations within the limited and limiting criteria of RAEs or TQAs in fact removes instructors from both research and teaching to such a degree that any benefit is rendered moot (2002:35). Shore and Wright agree by calling not for the reform of the audit system but instead an acknowledgement of the 'market-driven system of accountability' that underlies it (2000:85).

In some ways, I share the natural skepticism of some of these authors towards evaluation, agreeing that it so often requires coming up with a bottom-line conclusion – a de-contextualised ranking that can be fed into an institutional review or a 'gossipy' website for students. Yet, in my experience as an evaluator, I have learned that, fundamentally, the results of evaluations will depend on the objectives identified and on the methodology utilised. Broadfoot (2000:208) makes this point as well, noting the 'groundswell of international opinion in favour of new developments in educational assessment which can be applied in a more valid way in relation to real-life performances and tasks'.

Working as an evaluator, I have learned that much of evaluation can be accomplished within the context of what teachers and facilitators are *already doing*. Rather than asking students to complete extensive, inflexible questionnaires, we could collect information in embedded and academically useful ways. For instance, courses in which students write journal entries could include weeks in which they, instead, reflect on their journey in the course. With their permission, these entries could be used to chart student trajectories through the subject matter. When student evaluation exercises are fun and interactive, they are far more likely to portray the nuance and subtlety of learning and less likely to result in endless streams of 'I enjoyed the course' or 'it was interesting'-type responses. Not only is this more meaningful for the instructor, it is better grounded in the individual students own learning trajectory – giving the student an opportunity to reflect on learning and the instructor a specific and individualised measure against which progression (or lack thereof) can be seen.

These embedded activities stand in opposition to the audit-style activities criticised above. Certainly Furedi's (2002) assessment that often, institutional assessment practices mask a model of higher education that privileges the 'consumer' over the student had a great deal of validity, but I believe the methods are only an extension of this attitude, rather than the cause. For example, if questionnaires are written in order to rank teachers subtly or explicitly on their personal affect and 'accessibility' (as Brookfield 1995 evocatively describes), then inevitably the results of this type of evaluation will be based on the questionnaire's assumptions of what constitutes an excellent instructor. The ultimate manifestation of this is the reliance on exam results as the arbiter of what is considered good teaching. As many primary and secondary school teachers have lamented, if a teacher is judged only by the 'hard' evidence of exam results rather than the 'soft' evidence of other forms of assessment, the limited picture of their performance corresponds to the limited scope of the question and the methods of gathering the data (Boyle and Christie 1996).

However, when considered holistically and beyond simply handing over crunched numbers to administrators, self- and student-evaluation of teaching can have myriad benefits. Brookfield's (1995) call for 'critical reflection' – certainly broadly applicable to tutorial teaching and other pedagogies - is an emphasis on meaningful reflexivity, both on styles of teaching and on the wider context of students' learning, which can inevitably help us communicate to others why we do what we do. As Brookfield (1995) notes, this reflection is essential as an instructor, not only to put your students' comments in context but also to share pedagogy with others and avoid the supposition that teaching is an 'unfathomable mystery' that will disappear under scrutiny.

Applying Evaluation Techniques in Teaching

While cognizant of the overall framework of 'managerialsim' encroaching on the academy, I am nonetheless wary of conflating all forms of teaching assessment. While large-scale audits may be used to satisfy abstract government objectives at the expense of teaching and research, I nonetheless feel certain that there is a place within teaching for rigorous and sensitive self-evaluation, as well as feedback from students, mentors and peers. In this section, I detail some of the evaluation activities that I have incorporated into my own teaching, and what some of the outcomes of those activities have been for me as an instructor. Here, I detail the three main methods that I have used for evaluating my own teaching thus far: creative evaluation exercises, student feedback forms, and post-teaching reflection journals.

Inspired by my use of creative evaluation work in my research, at the end of my first term teaching a group of second year Human Sciences students I decided to use some of the methods I had utilised during my fieldwork. I presented my students with a piece of butcher paper with a single line drawn down the middle with the words Start and Finish written at both ends. I asked them to break the line up into 'chapters' however they saw fit. Interpreting this literally, the students broke the line into four sections – each representing one of the tutorial topics we had discussed. They further broke each section down into the days of reading and then the period of the tutorial itself. I asked them to use lines, words or drawings to chart how they'd felt at each of the different points along the line, what they had found exciting and what they had found challenging. I took notes during the discussion as they worked on the graph and also prepared a sheet of paper with their notes and lines to reflect on in my own time later (attached is a sample picture of this exercise from my fieldwork).

This exercise taught me several key points. Practically, it informed me that I had been assigning about the right amount of reading, that the students had been initially intimidated by the reading but had, with perseverance, understood the material in the end (as indicated by the upward arc of the lines and the comments about tutorials). I felt some personal satisfaction at seeing the peaks of the lines in our tutorials, and the conversation surrounding the lines indicated that they felt a deeper understanding of the material through participation in the tutorial sessions. This led to a frank discussion of whether they felt that they were solidifying their own ideas or learning to parrot mine, as we explored some of the specific content of each of the sessions – in particular the session on phenomenology where they had challenged some of my ideas. I recorded the insights from this exercise and the discussion it initiated, and reflected on it in future sessions when I planned reading lists and led discussions.

My previous experience as a facilitator in youth programmes had taught me that the use of creative evaluation strategies such as the exercise just described can glean significant information for the tutor. However, particularly in a context such as Oxford where the high levels of literacy and comfort with writing and expressing one's opinions are positively selected for as an admissions criteria, evaluation forms are also useful tools. In my research context often there were considerations of levels of literacy, whereas in my experience of teaching in Oxford students actively wanted to write, and, in fact, sometimes viewed drawing or more creative activities with suspicion. I therefore also incorporated questionnaires which included open-ended questions in addition to queries which would be more easily answered by numerical rankings (see below).

For instance, in response to the statement 'I feel that the level and amount of assigned readings is appropriate', four students ticked the 'Strongly Agree' box and four students ticked the 'Agree' box (out of a total of 8 responses for that particular question). Given that 100% of respondents basically agreed with the statement I felt confident in the level and amount of readings as a result. The feedback from the questionnaires also strongly indicated that I needed to re-evaluate the structure and wording of the essay topics that I set. In response to the statement 'I feel the essay questions are useful and help me to understand the readings' six respondents ticked 'agree' but also wrote the following comments: 'right amount of reading but perhaps more direction, question titles very general and sometimes hard to know where to start' and 'the first three essay questions were very general and it was therefore difficult to make an argument or to focus the reading'. These fairly unambiguous responses given on a mid-term evaluation were underlined in discussion and subsequently led me to significantly rephrase the essay topics, moving from a more generalised topic such as 'How have anthropologists understood the nature of ethnic ties?' to a topic which conveyed a more specific structure and criteria for the reading, such as 'Are gender differences primarily determined by the facts of biology or are they cultural constructs?'

In contrast, more open-ended questions were useful in determining what students had found particularly challenging in the course, and what, if anything, they had gotten out of my own particular brand of teaching. Here are some sample questions and responses from my questionnaires, together with my analysis of the responses and my inclusion in future teaching:

Has the feedback from the tutor been useful? How might it be improved?

- Good, especially in tutorials and in individual sessions about essays.
- Yes, I found that talking individually about essays was particularly useful.
- Feedback has been very useful – particularly the warning about citations.
- It could be easier to read! Otherwise very good.
- Really liked the personal discussion about my progress and where I could improve. A little more feedback on the essays would be great.

The responses to this question were particularly illuminating on a practical level. Though tutorial groups are often small (I met with a maximum of three students at any given time), I nonetheless had made it a point to meet individually with students at least once per term. Clearly this individual attention was considered by the students to be of benefit. The comments about my handwriting have been duly noted, and I have also used the feedback about the citations to include in my teaching with students in subsequent terms.

What have you found most useful on this course?

- Good tutorials – enhanced understanding greatly.
- The tutorials help me to think critically about my essays and to understand any areas I wasn't sure of in the reading. I have enjoyed the discussions and found them very interesting.
- Reading new ethnographic studies, good for exam essays. Tutorials useful for going over anything I hadn't understood from the readings.
- Learning to approach things in a non-ethnocentric way. Opening eyes to the massive variety of human ways of approaching things, provides a useful antithesis to sociology and behavior sciences.
- The discussions in tutorials, raising new ideas and clarifying points I was not sure about.
- I learned more about the assumptions that we make and to be more specific and try to think about the issues across geographic and social boundaries more.

Qualitatively, the feedback forms therefore gave me insight into my students' experiences of tutorials, and I was somewhat gratified that almost universally they felt that the tutorials had enhanced their understanding of materials. In terms of honing future teaching practice, certain specific comments were particularly useful and showed that I had accomplished some of what I intended to do as a tutor as well as what the course itself was constructed in order to achieve. The specific comments in response to this question were useful, for example, student's comments that 'Tutorials have helped clarify and consolidate the topics much more than readings/lectures. Also feedback from essays has been useful' and '[I've found it useful] learning to approach things in a non-ethnocentric way. Opening eyes to the massive variety of human ways of approaching things - provides a useful antithesis to sociology and behavior sciences'.

The first of these comments spoke specifically to my role as a tutor - to draw out and contextualise material that students might not understand in other forms of learning they engage in. The second comment related to the experience of a student in their first year on the Human Sciences course. As an anthropology tutor I hoped that learning about social anthropology – even if the students were not to go on to study it in the future – might provide a useful antidote to the more quantitative and universalizing subjects they worked within the rest of the time. This comment indicated that, for that student at least, the tutorials and readings had achieved some degree of success measured against that objective.

The questionnaires were framed not only in order to evaluate my teaching, but also – like the graphing exercise above – for the students to reflect on their own learning trajectories throughout the course. To that end, I specifically included questions such as 'what have you found most challenging?' and 'what are you most proud of?' in the list of questions, both oriented not only to shed light on areas where they felt they had gotten into trouble but also topics or experiences that had helped them to feel that they were solidifying their learning. These responses indicate a degree of reflexivity on the part of the students. For instance, in response to the question 'What have you found most challenging on this course?' one student wrote 'Figuring out what to include in the essay, finding out what the main points are' while another commented 'Course was harder than I thought it would be! More theory than expected – need to know more background, but also more relevant to everyday (modern) topics – i.e. ethnicity'. These two responses show that the students were able, at least momentarily, to consider their own growth in the course. The first response indicates a student struggling but ultimately succeeding in unpicking the essay questions and figuring out what, precisely, they were asking – a useful skill for exams. The second response shows the students confrontation with theory, but also their own burgeoning ability to demonstrate how the theory corresponds to real-world phenomena. A third response to the question stated, 'Getting my head round some of the theory, however I feel that after the tutorial I understood this a lot

more, and perhaps knew more than I realised to begin with'. This response shows how the student was able to recognise his or her own knowledge and hopefully feel confident in future tutorials.

A third method of evaluation I used was to keep my own journal following tutorial sessions, to capture some of my impressions of what had gone well or not so well during a session. Here is a sample section of one of my tutorial journals:

> Thoughts on tutorial with Human Sciences 1st years, HT09
>
> Mixed session today, worried I've talked too much – they are much more quiet than the other group so do I try too hard to fill the space? But got interesting after a slow first 20 mins. R came out really strongly against a phenomenological approach, saying he didn't like it because it was too much 'like an idea from the humanities' and that it seemed 'detached from the world' and trendy (interesting as its about 'being in the world')… H talking about how you can't be sure of your observations in the other 'sciences' as well, discussion of whether any scientific approach is ever wholly 'true' – challenging each other in a good way though worry that R is being ganged up on? Seems he can hold his own.

Reviewing these entries later allowed me access to my own insights about the sessions, once memory had faded, or to compare between sessions. Looking back at several of my journal entries, I came up with the following list of things that I felt I could improve upon, or things that were going well:

Areas for improvement:

- Don't feel the need to fill empty space with talking – let them get to the next point themselves.
- Make sure not giving the 'answers' so much as encouraging their thinking.
- Stick to plans made before session – often am getting off track and forgetting that I've introduced a structure.
- Provide more structured discussion methods for quieter groups.
- Need to have more confidence in my own preparedness.
- Bring in audio-visual or other materials where possible.

Going well:

- Encouraging a supportive atmosphere where everyone talks.
- They seem to be able to arrive at the conclusion that they know more than they thought they did – scared off by essay questions but do actually understand the readings.
- One on one time/personal feedback really important in groups.
- Seem to be taking different positions naturally and engaging with/challenging each other.

While inherently subjective, this exercise in self-reflexivity helped me identify my own strengths and weaknesses as an instructor. The lessons included here have already been incorporated into my subsequent teaching.

Conclusion: Moving Forward

Conducting these exercises has given me a deeper appreciation of my students' experiences of my teaching, and allowed me a structured method through which I have recorded my own observations. Already, I have been able to use some of the insights gleaned through the activities discussed above in order to improve my own pedagogic practice. For instance, I have repeated the custom of meeting with students individually during the term, and have continued to hone and refine my essay topics and reading lists.

However, while I am largely enthusiastic about the benefits of evaluation in my own praxis, I am mindful of the veracity of the critiques of academic 'audit culture' discussed above. I find the case for the 'bureaucratisation' of the British University presented in Furedi (2002) and Strathern (2000) compelling from personal experience working within both Universities of Oxford and Surrey, where quantifiable targets are circulated with administrative rather than academic objectives in mind.

Yet I nonetheless believe that there is an essential place for evaluation within the academy, if it is conducted with mindfulness towards the intended outcomes. Instructors who use some sort of evaluative mechanism – whether as

targeted as I describe here or in another guise – are no doubt more able to accurately understand their students' experiences. There is no question that the vast majority of good instructors are already doing some sort of reflexive work regarding their teaching, yet perhaps not choosing to label it 'evaluation'. Reviewing the literature regarding evaluation in higher education reveals that it is not individual evaluative practices that are so vilified, so much as the institutional use of the data that they produce. While we should maintain a critical stance towards the collection of data for administrative purposes that decontextualise the content and obscure the practice of teaching, I also believe that on the level of practice we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater. This may be optimistic, but I wonder if instructors could share the results of their evaluation activities with the institution, whether they might be required to do less of the distasteful tick-boxing that undermines both teaching and learning at all levels. Perhaps laments about assessment are not best dealt with wholesale rejection of evaluation, but by adopting individualised and flexible ways of reflecting on teaching, and by encouraging the same reflexivity in teaching practice that we ask for in our own research.

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