We hope to design a study on the development of a course on our master’s program. The course has been developed over two years in order to address two fundamental problems in the ten year old program: students from Asian and African countries were often unable to complete the program. The hitch seemed to be writing and discussing in an independent, critical and reflective way. The aim of this seminar is to share our experiences with teachers from other international programs.

This paper introduces the epistemological context first, our interlocutors Paul Trowler and Ali Cooper, and their concept of Teaching and Learning Regimes. Having introduced that, we move on to introduce the analytical-pedagogical approach to the simultaneous shaping of identities and learning of the students. Finally, we present the students classroom activities which make up the studied case and which is also what we try to develop.

**Epistemological Context**

Studies in higher education has dealt with learning from a developmental perspective (human cognitive development goes through developmental stages, adult learners and students go through developmental stages), reflexive learning, learning as social activity as intertwined with identity building. It has studied teaching in similar ways; teachers go through developmental stages, teachers develop by reflection, teaching as a social activity and as intertwined with identity building. One contribution to the studies of teaching as social activity intertwined with identity building is the perspective of Teaching and Learning Regime (TLR), defined as ‘A constellation of rules, assumptions, practices and relationships related to teaching and learning issues in higher education’ (Trowler & Cooper 2002:224).

TLR has become a taken for granted umbrella concept in the scholarship of teaching and learning research field, and been used in pedagogical developmental courses for almost two decades. As a concept it aims to untangle and systematize university teachers’ different teaching and learning philosophies, imaginations, practices and performativities as defined by their departments/teaching units, and how the regimes affect their approach to teacher training and new approaches to teaching and learning presented there. Trowler and Cooper conclude that incompatibilities between TLRs often do not surface until critical incidents occur which demonstrate the apparently incommensurable nature of the different approaches to teaching and learning instantiated in the program and the individual’s attitudes, values and practices (2002: 235-236). The clash will result in resistance in a situation where the teacher experiences themselves as novice and when the clash between TLRs threatens their identity. TLR has thus been a useful concept when addressing the teacher as a professional subject defined in a specific context and how teachers are more or less willing to get into dialogue with other pedagogical epistemologies and change their own approach to teaching.

Our conviction is that if the heterogeneity of previous learning-experiences is not taken in to consideration it can make learning difficult for some and result in positive discrimination for others. We decided to try by bringing the concept of TLR it into the class room, in order to create a vocabulary for discussing learning with the students. We wanted to find out how students can develop writing and discussion skills in a critical and independent way by better understanding learning and the classroom experience. Perhaps it could be argued that the students have always already been a part of the TLR as it is based on a pedagogical epistemology that stresses the social character of teaching and learning and the social constructivist nature of knowledge, we
present here a use of TLR that expands the concept and may be of great value for the students to reflect upon their prior and future learning. Metaphorically, we take them “backstage” and make our TLR visible for them: how we perceive knowledge and learning, how we show ability to reason in an independent way in writing and discussion, also offering them a week of meta-reflection on their own epistemological journey as university students. In this presentation, we consequently suggest that the concept is as useful as a practical didactic tool in interaction with students as it is as a tool among teachers. In Goffman’s terms, it is as useful ‘frontstage’ as it is ‘backstage’. We intend to develop this idea more carefully and look forward to the discussion coming out of this seminar.

Our Analytical-Pedagogical Approach and what we would like to do

Departing from the idea that the learner’s previous knowledge influences what they can learn we concluded that in order to help the students learn you should map what the students already know about learning, which we did by simply asking them. In order to help the students talk about what they already knew we provided them with concepts for discussing learning and knowledge, and thick descriptions of their tacit assumptions, rules of appropriateness, recurrent practices and discursive repertoires supported by the teachers at the program, all parts of our TLR. When we asked the students during class to share what they knew from before and how they had learned it we were surprised at what we found. About 2/3 had never attended a seminar before and about 3/4 had only ever encountered classroom exams prior to their bachelor thesis. 1/2 had never written any text other than summary-like texts. Many had impressive mnemonic techniques. It was our impression that being able to talk about different TLRs made it possible for them to discuss differences between universities within their country of origin and leave stereotypes behind. Using the TLR discussion tools the students were able to share previous experiences in a very respectful way, possibly facilitating a continuity between previous identities as learners and the learning identity the program encouraged and demanded.

Research into adult learning stresses that the window for learning is open when the student understands how they will use the knowledge and when they feel secure. Having your identity threatened is not helpful to feeling secure. In cases where an individual (teacher) is repositioned as “novice” in a new social context (in a teacher training course) we can expect trouble, according to Trowler and Cooper. Where the new learning is also perceived to be a threat to identity there will be some anxiety because real learning involves change. Was the new learning a threat to previous identities as learners and if so, how did that make the students feel. That is why we asked students to write personal reflections at the end of the week on what they had learned and what they thought about it. We have collected 97 papers over the two years. The reflections show bewilderment, testify to insecurity but overall account for excitement of taking learning seriously and the calming effect of getting to practice examining activities and grading. The reflections show an eagerness to take on the new challenge and curiosity about what may be learned by these new ways of learning.

Incongruities between the teaching in a master’s program and other identities such as formative study experiences or work life roles, may lead to antagonism, anxiety or other negative responses if students show the same reactions as Trowler and Cooper’s teachers. As we already know, incompatibilities between TLR’s often do not surface until critical incidents occur. For this reason, we would like to isolate critical incidents by interviewing class representatives. The incidents, together with the findings from a thorough analysis of the reflection papers, could give valuable questions to focus group interviews with the two generations of master’s students. However, the aim of the course development was to help students learn how to write, discuss and ultimately think in an independent, critical and reflective way. The outcome of our effort should be evaluated by comparing depth of knowledge displayed in exams before and after the change. The idea is to analyze 4-5 of the weakest theses / specific exams from students before and after the TLR course. The same should be done with 4-5 of the strongest theses / specific exams.

Finally, ethically speaking, the study implies a new way to face an international group of students, an encounter with its own set of practical, theoretical and ethical implications and consequences that also requires self-reflection. Even if this approach aims as being a learning situation of inclusion, it is nevertheless a social teaching and learning situation of inherent power circulations and intentions. Inclusion does not eradicate the institutional and organizational power distinctions between teacher and student.
Practicing TLR in the Classroom – An Introduction Week

With these analytical-pedagogical guidelines, we welcomed a group of almost 60 new students from all over the world to the new semester fall 2018. After the fall of 2018 we evaluated their experience through their reflection papers, gathered the teachers’ impressions, and redesigned. We made extensive clarifications of and instructions for tasks in writing provided from day 1. We prepared the distributions before learning activities of good examples from last years’ students. And we made more room for students sharing their experiences with one another. With the developed schedule and intended learning outcomes below we welcomed almost 100 students in the fall 2019:

Monday 2/9

9.15-12 Course introduction. Britta Persson, Richard Ek and Elin Bommenel
13.15-15 What is learning? Elin Bommenel and Richard Ek
15.15-15.45 Library information. Sara Rondahl
15.45-17 Research and best practice on learning. Elin Bommenel

Tuesday 3/9: Work from home or the library

Home assignment: write paper with deep understanding of three articles (instructions below and links to articles at Canvas)

Wednesday 4/9

10.00 Upload deep understanding paper on Canvas.
10.15-11 Tips and advice from previous students. Victor Agbebo
11.15-12 Designing and grading exams. Elin Bommenel
13.15-15 Workshop: Design, take, correct and grade an exam for deep learning. Elin Bommenel

Thursday 5/9

9.15-12 Academic integrity. Elin Bommenel
14.15-16 Workshop: Peer feedback on home assignment paper. Elin Bommenel


Friday 6/9

9.15-12 Seminar activity. Inclusion and exclusion. Group work. Elin Bommenel
14-16 Seminar: on Caprioli’s masters thesis. Elin Bommenel
16.15-17 Sum up and preparations for individual reflections. Elin Bommenel

Home work: Upload individual reflection on Canvas no later than Tuesday 11/9 17.00
Intended learning outcomes

After the introductory week you are supposed to:

- Be able to identify and describe the learning regime(s) of your former education(s).
- Be able to describe the learning regime of your masters program, and in your own words relate it to the concepts of knowledge, learning, deep approach to learning, independent understanding, critical understanding, inclusion/exclusion, learning in groups and learning from discussion.
- Comprehend the different kinds of exams of the program as well as academic integrity, and apply them in examining activities.
- Be able to identify and reflect on your own motivations for learning and preferred ways of learning.

We are hoping that some colleagues may have tried help international students develop learning skills they did not previously have, tried interviewing class representatives, done a thematic analysis of reflection papers (or the likes of it), carried out focus group interviews with their students and/or evaluated the depth of learning by comparing exams before and after a specific change. We are hoping that some colleagues find the idea of bringing TLR in to the classroom as thought provoking and worth discussing. All comments are very welcome.

The ideas of our interlocutors can be found here: