



Techniques for Teaching Theory in the Classroom

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Overview of Session

- ▶ Context
- ▶ Teaching:
 - ▶ Moral Theories
 - ▶ Thinkers/ Texts
 - ▶ Concepts
 - ▶ Ideologies
- ▶ Writing a Textbook

Context

- ▶ Teaching Experience
- ▶ Students at QMUL
- ▶ Aims of teaching political theory
 - ▶ Knowledge/ Understanding of ideas (deep/ surface learning)
 - ▶ Reading skills
 - ▶ Writing skills
 - ▶ Oral communication skills
 - ▶ Reasoning skills
 - ▶ Analysis
 - ▶ Interpretation
 - ▶ Argument (inductive and deductive)
- ▶ Problems for students:
 - ▶ no clear cut right and wrong answers
 - ▶ abstraction

Scaffolding for interactive learning

- ▶ Syllabus
- ▶ Structured Reading list
 - ▶ Readings related to topics
 - ▶ Distinguish into more and less introductory
 - ▶ Direction for students about how to use the materials
- ▶ Lectures
- ▶ Contexts for Q&A, iteration
 - ▶ Lectures, office hours, classes

General Points in relation to interactive teaching

- ▶ Get the class comfortable with you and each other
- ▶ Variety of tasks
- ▶ Alternating whole group and small group activities (managing small groups) – enabling different types of interaction
- ▶ Be specific in what you are asking students to do
- ▶ Get students to report back
- ▶ Always re-cap at the end – bring out takeaway points drawing on student input

Things to avoid:

- ✓ open and general questions addressed to no one in particular
- Assuming all students are equally well-prepared/ able
- Putting anyone down (even the talkers)

Teaching Moral Theories

- ▶ Build on their own intuitions about right and wrong on specific issues – how does their moral thinking fit with the theories?
- ▶ Using examples to clarify distinctions:
 - ▶ Eg. In differentiating universalist approaches to ethics
- ▶ Putting knowledge to work
 - ▶ Grading exercises – exam scripts/ coursework on relevant material
 - ▶ Ask students to create/ reproduce thought-experiments
 - ▶ Eg. Rawls's original position
 - ▶ Enacting debates between perspectives on specific issues
 - ▶ Should states control their own borders?
 - ▶ Is the current global distribution of wealth unjust?

Teaching thinkers/ texts

- ▶ Exercises relating to thinkers/ texts for comprehension (technical language issues), eg. quizzes
- ▶ Enhancing comprehension, identifying points of comparison/ difference with other texts/ thinkers, eg. Group work on short extracts from the texts
- ▶ Relation of canonic texts to issues that matter to students:
 - ▶ Linking Hegel's struggle for recognition to contemporary feminist and post-colonial discussions;
 - ▶ Linking Kant's categorical imperative to contemporary discussions about human rights

Teaching Concepts

- ▶ Showing rather than saying
- ▶ Relating to concrete examples
 - ▶ Don't ask 'what is democracy?', ask whether the UK Brexit referendum result is democratic – use that to build up familiarity with different ways of conceiving 'democracy' and the relation between 'democracy' and other concepts like 'freedom' or 'rights'
- ▶ Analyzing short non-academic texts – newspapers, policy documents, magazine articles, blogs

Teaching ideologies

- ▶ Use political compass test
 - ▶ Get them to take it – discuss their own positioning along left/right; authoritarian/ libertarian spectra with each other;
 - ▶ Place existing political parties in relation to the spectra;
 - ▶ Draw on this to problematize hard and fast distinctions between political ideologies;
 - ▶ Relate back to Michael Freeden reading on notion of ideology
 - ▶ Only then go on to unpick particular ideological traditions in more depth

How do you know what works?

- ▶ Different measures of success:
 - ▶ Student engagement?
 - ▶ Quality of student discussion?
 - ▶ Student attainment?
 - ▶ Student feedback?

GLOBAL



ETHICS

An Introduction

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Writing a Textbook: how can interactive learning be incorporated?

- ▶ Material
- ▶ Structure
- ▶ Introductory Chapter
- ▶ Exercises
- ▶ Further Reading

Aiming for a virtuous circle of learning