Connecting with Colleagues to Deepen Student Learning

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The “Decoding the Disciplines” Cycle

1. What is a bottleneck to learning in this class, a place where many students consistently fail to master crucial material?

2. What do specialists do so they get past this bottleneck?

3. How can I explicitly model these operations for students?

4. How can I give my students an opportunity to practice and get feedback on each of these operations?

5. How can I motivate students and address the affective side of learning?

6. How can I tell whether students have mastered these operations by the end of the process?

7. How can I share what I have learned with others?
Handout 2

Prototype Developmental Curriculum (Adopted in Principle by IU History Department)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Thinking</th>
<th>100 Level [Comprehend/Recognize]</th>
<th>200 Level [Interpret/Apply]</th>
<th>300 Level [Explain/Evaluate]</th>
<th>400 Level [Create]</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Historical Discipline &amp; Analysis</td>
<td>Learn about the interpretative nature of the historical discipline (vs. idea of a history as a compilation of facts and dates). Students will learn to distinguish between broader themes, evidence and opinions in texts, and an appreciation for the complexity of both change and continuity over time.</td>
<td>Expand understanding of the interpretative nature of the historical discipline by illustrating how historians make interpretations of the past using primary and secondary sources. One major aim of the courses at this level is to interpret specific examples in terms of broader themes/context/processes. Students should be able to recreate historical context.</td>
<td>Appraise historical interpretations. Students will evaluate different interpretations and historical materials for a single historical problem. Should be able to compare a range of perspectives or viewpoints that arise from looking at a series of documents.</td>
<td>Synthesize multiple historical interpretations and possibly group them by school of thought.</td>
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Bottlenecks & Difficulties for Students
- Thinking of history as a compilation of unrelated dates and facts, not as a method to interpret the past.
- Distinguishing main and secondary points in readings. This is also an issue when taking notes in lecture.
- Understanding historical change
- Because students do not see the role of history or of the historians as that of interpreting, deriving meaning from the past, they do not see history as a subjective discipline where arguments are based on the interpretation of evidence.
- Identifying with people from another place and time.
- Understanding notions of time.
- Seeing artifacts from the past as representing human choices that change over time.
- History should provide a “truth” in the view of many students. Thus, many do not understand why they need to evaluate different arguments about a problem of the past. They see themselves as unsuited to provide their own insight/opinion on an issue.
- Dealing with ambiguity in sources
- Unwilling to wait for an answer to the problem studied.
- The interpretative nature of History implies that there will be different interpretations and that the assumptions/theoretical perspectives followed by scholars can be actually grouped by school of thought. These interpretations and school of thoughts on an issue do change over time. This historiographical perspective entails a higher understanding of the interpretative nature of the discipline on students, which many majors lack.
- When sources are ambiguous,
### Dealing with Evidence: Primary sources

Discriminate between a primary and a secondary source and their uses in research. Learn how to analyze/learn to question a primary source will be explicitly emphasized in these courses: Who wrote it, when, why, audience, historical context, inferences that can be drawn from it, etc. In other words, students will comprehend how to extract information from documents and relate it to broader course theme(s).

Recognize the place, time and human agency behind the production of a primary source.

Interpret the human agency within the context of how an artifact from the past was produced and of the times in which people lived.

Evaluate the trustworthiness of sources. Students will be expected to compare and contrast diverse and potentially conflicting primary sources for a single historical problem.

Develop relationships among multiple sources and synthesize the major connecting issues among them.

#### Bottlenecks & Difficulties for Students

- Recognizing the variety of primary sources and interpret them.
- Recreating historical context and connecting it to a document. Beginning to empathize with people from another place and time.

- Recreating historical context and connecting it to a document.
- Identifying, empathizing with people form another place and time.

- Dealing with ambiguity and contradiction in historical sources.

- Recognizing major points in primary and secondary sources.
- Producing some sense connecting multiple sources by themselves.
Team-Based Learning in a History Class: Using TBL to Motivate Disciplinary Thinking

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Background: The course Latin American Colonial History Survey has been part of a 3-year Teagle and Spencer Foundation study to find effective ways to help students construct arguments based on documentary evidence and to express this in writing. In particular, the class focused on helping students analyze primary sources and put them in conversation with other course materials in order to produce a historical argument. Even though the instructor explicitly modeled the expected disciplinary thinking needed to execute these skills to the students, and provided some opportunities to practice, many students were not motivated to bring the several skills together for their essay exams. In the fall of 2009 the class was revamped using Team Based Learning (TBL) (Michaelsen, 2004) to address the motivation problem.

Description: Using the Decoding the Discipline (DtD) Method (Middendorf and Pace, 2004), the instructor had already analyzed major bottlenecks to learning in this course and ways of modeling these, including the weekly learning outcomes. This prior work allowed the seamless transformation of this lecture and active learning class into a TBL class, which in turn helped to solve the motivation problem within the DtD method. In the non-TBL version of the same class, most students consistently went back to factual and descriptive writings rather than come closer to interpretative essays. When they did active learning exercises, they were told the work was good, but there was no explicit rubric for everyone to publicly measure their work against. How did TBL help? First, the individual and group Readiness Assessment Tests were used to motivate students to look for readings’ thesis statement and major points rather than memorization of facts. Students were allowed to bring their reading notes (to promote note-taking) to the quizzes and this encouraged them to focus on understanding the content of the reading. Second, in the eight Application Projects throughout the semester students practiced solving historical problems by extracting and interpreting evidence from documents and by formulating arguments with their teams. The explicit and very public way the Application Projects were presented and evaluated provided immediate, specific feedback about the kind of thinking required. By the time of their take-home essay exams, students had already analyzed much of the materials in groups, and had practiced the interpretative not descriptive work.

Preliminary Results: Two of the four essay exams have been coded based on the course bottlenecks. In a scale from 0 to 4, the level of students’ thinking shown in their essay arguments and source analysis was assessed, assigning a “0” when the execution was wrong or non-existent, all the way to a 4, which denoted a high level of interpretation and synthesis. The level of thinking demonstrated in the thesis statements improved from an average of 1.82 in the first exams to 2.85 in the second exams (out of 4). In terms of the level of thinking when connecting sources, the improvement was remarkable, from a mean of 0.71 in the first exam to 2.79 in the second. All of these means were statistically significant. Compared to last year’s non-TBL class, students were able to move faster to higher levels of interpretation, and more students are enthusiastic on improving their work. Also, improvement seems to be more evident among below average and average students.

1 This project is being carried out by the History Learning Project (Leah Shopkow, David Pace, Joan Middendorf and Arlene Diaz) at Indiana University-Bloomington. http://www.iub.edu/~hlp/
Handout 4

References:

Links
Freshman Learning Project <http://www.indiana.edu/~teaching/communities/flpindex.shtml>
History Learning Project: <http://www.iub.edu/~hlp/>