



The politics of education policy in the UK

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What are the links between teaching and research ?

The lecturer develops students' appreciation of research/consultancy in the discipline by using teaching and learning processes which simulate research processes. She also develops student research/consultancy skills by using assignments which involve elements of research processes.

Context:

Module title: Politics of Education Policy in the UK

Course title: BA Social Sciences (UG)

Level: 4

Year(s): 2&3

Module aims:

This twelve week unit is taught to a range of students registered for taking subject bases including History, Sociology and Politics. A pre-requisite is that all students taking the module will have taken modules in political science in previous years.

The approach to the module is interdisciplinary from the outset. Indeed, every module these students will have taken previous to this will have been designed to underscore interdisciplinary study. The challenge faced by the tutor is to achieve a balance between the need to provide a structure for learning and to develop each student's individual study skills.

Module structure:

To provide a structure for learning the module begins with four weeks of overview lectures where current educational policy issues are flagged up and tutors foreground research methodologies in the literature they recommend and materials they cite. A detailed module handbook outlines the core themes to be covered and also includes directed reading questions which can form the basis of seminar and tutorial discussion. There is also more one to one tutorial contact at the beginning of the module to help with the formative assessment tasks. Blackboard (a requirement under the School of Law and Social Science's teaching and learning strategy) is also well populated with bibliographies and reading lists.

Progression and development:

The opportunity to develop, practice and progress individual study skills primarily takes place via seminar and tutorials, two formative pieces of work and one piece of summative assessment. Everything is planned to encourage progression and development. For example, in week 6 the students are asked to devise their own essay question coupled with a bibliography which demonstrates their awareness of current research. Before this students will have been asked to deconstruct examples of research in seminars to demonstrate the research methodologies underpinning publications. The tutor may select a policy document which relies on qualitative research methodologies (such as a current policy document published on the Scottish Executive website) and ask students to compare this with a press release from the Department for Education and Science where the focus is more frequently quantitative. In addition, students are encouraged to explore and link to the overarching themes laid out in the early lectures by bringing related case studies to seminars. They are expected to chair and present these case studies to the group. Throughout the course guest speakers are invited to talk about current issues.

Assessment:

The end of module summative assessment is an unseen examination requiring answers to questions which have emerged from the year's seminar programme and core themes.

Hot tips

'When teaching such a range of students registered for different subject strands it is really important to make yourself aware of the workloads and assessment requirements they have in other modules.'

Student feedback:

Feedback from students demonstrates that they like the relevance of the course – particularly its focus on up to date current issues. This focus makes it easier for them to appreciate the theoretical and political implications of published research studies.

Problems/issues:

There have been three main issues. The first is workload – the course is quite intensive. The second is the mixed ability nature of the groups. Some students who did not achieve highly earlier in their degree can struggle with Honours level courses. Thirdly, tutors have noticed a growing number of students juggling part time job commitments to fund their courses.

Additional information:

The Scottish Executive publications can be found at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent>



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