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Teaching portfolio

1. Teaching CV

I have an up to date list of courses, supervision etc. on PURE (and it is public). These include all those that I have done since I came to Denmark. See list here: <https://portal.findresearcher.sdu.dk/en/persons/cowley/courses/>

2. Pedagogical practice

I have almost 40 years of experience that began with training in teaching English as a Foreign Language. (I obtained a Masters degree in EFL in 1984 –awarded with distinction). At university, I had experience of supervision at Cambridge –as undergraduate, PHD student and as supervisor. These two experiences stamps everything that I do.

My main goal is to get students think for themselves –and I eschew any attempt to tell them what they should believe. Accordingly, I encourage criticism and aim at excellence. Often, I say that there is no such thing as ‘teaching’, only learning. Given my values, however, I prefer not to reward students who have made the effort; accordingly, am generous with my time and my marking. My main goal is to give everyone a sense that, at very least, they can learn to learn. I design slides diligently and regard these as a lifeline for weak students. However, I regard the blackboard as the more important tool (and regard the provision at Slagelse as excellent).

In recent years with the shift away from book-based literacy, I have developed strategies for countering digital dependence. In standard courses, I increasingly insist on project work that can subsequently be used in getting beyond basics. Increasingly, I oblige them to present posters and make presentations during class time. I take seriously the demand that lecturing occupy no more than a quarter of contact time and have drastically reduced them reading that is required of students. Where possible, I they do work outside the classroom and I organize sessions to discuss what they do with groups. For example, courses in Organizational Cognition and Applied Methods depend on student collection and analysis of data –especially videos. Subsequent assessment demands reflection on what they did and learned. In Ecolinguistics, a field where I am an international leader, all students carried out a project in the local community.

While students often find my concerns abstract, they concur that my teaching is interesting and, as is often said, unlike anything else they have encountered. They say that my expectations are quite different and that, unusually, I am always interested in what they teach me. To my shock, I was recently told that I was one of the few staff who do not push ‘left wing’ political ideas. I regard it as a central part of my mission to encourage talented students to take part in research projects, make international visits and publish papers. I believe this should apply at Undergraduate level and upwards.

3. Action Plan

I am currently frustrated with my teaching in that, in recent years, I have been asked to courses in which I have little interest and no special expertise. I feel that, at SDU, my abilities are undervalued in a culture that seems increasingly focused on box ticking. Currently, I am engaged in academic research on how digital dependence inhibits reading/learning and will use this in further striving to convince students to use books, pen and paper as the basis for active thinking (i.e. not dominated by pre-designed questions, software imposed choices and formatting). I also intend to upgrade my skills with software for video analysis –one of the areas where my interests fit with those of younger people.

Generally, however, I still consider myself to be an inspiring lecturer and supervisor –and one who successfully nurtures academic ambition. I find that, at the level of BA projects, a surprising number of students choose to work with me and, in my judgement, the results are inspiring. Though I do not believe in teaching, I thoroughly enjoy the experience of learning together with young people.