A collaborative, ungraded course in morphology

Itamar Kastner (University of Edinburgh)
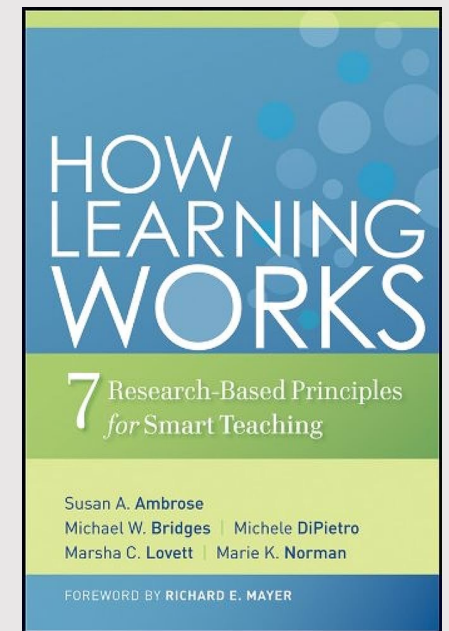
LAGB 2023, Anglia Ruskin University

What's our mission?

Learning is an ongoing process, not a contest (Ambrose et al 2010)

1. Learners engage with concepts and materials

2. Learners have opportunities to try things out, receive feedback from instructors, and try again.

3. The cycle repeats until some goals are met or exceeded.

Today: case study of a course which tried to align itself with this process.

(Freire 1968, Purpel 1988, hooks 1994, Sackstein 2015, Gannon 2020, etc)

What's our mission?

LEARNING IS ABOUT FEEDBACK, NOT ASSESSMENT
SO UNI BOFFINS DECIDED TO OVERASSESS

- Facilitation and feedback promote learning.
  - But UK institutions prioritise ranking edicts (numerical marks, moderation).
  - These have repeatedly been argued to hinder learning (Kohn 1993/2018, 2011; Davidson 2012; Stommel 2017; Blum 2020).
  - The *banking model* of education: the teacher is placed at the centre of the classroom as the source and assessor of knowledge (Freire 1968; hooks 1994).
  - Students get knowledge *delivered* to them and must return it to the teacher later.

- Agency and engagement promote learning (and a sense of belonging).

What's our mission?

- Our three assumptions for this course (also the talk outline):
    1. Learning is at its best an active and collaborative process (Hake 1998, etc).
        1. Active learning (puzzle-based)
        2. Small groups
        3. Group projects
    2. Grades are detrimental to learning (*ungrading*).
    3. Linguistics: morphology is a system of interactions between syntax, semantics and phonology.
        - This is a perfect place to synthesize and build theories.

UoE Morphology 2022-23

- Advanced undergraduate/master's course (module).

- Elective: not a core requirement, but satisfies some requirements.

- 25 students:
  - 14 UG
  - 7 PG
  - A few auditors (UG, MSc, PhD, visiting staff)

- Met 3 times a week, 50min sessions, for 9 weeks.
  - (one third struck out due to industrial action ✊)

Active learning

- Order of auxiliaries in English:
  - *The cake **will** have been (being) eaten.*
  - **Tense** > Perf > Prog > Pass > V.

- Each element takes semantic and phonological scope over the next.

- What's the order in Latin? (Embick 2010; Kastner and Zu 2017; Kastner 2019)
  - *am-ā-ve-ra-m*
    love-theme-Perf-Past-1sg
    'I had loved'
  - *am-ā-ve-r-ō*
    love-theme-Perf-Fut-1SG
    'I will have loved'

- Opposite linear order, same scopal relations.
 - V < Th < Perf < Tense.
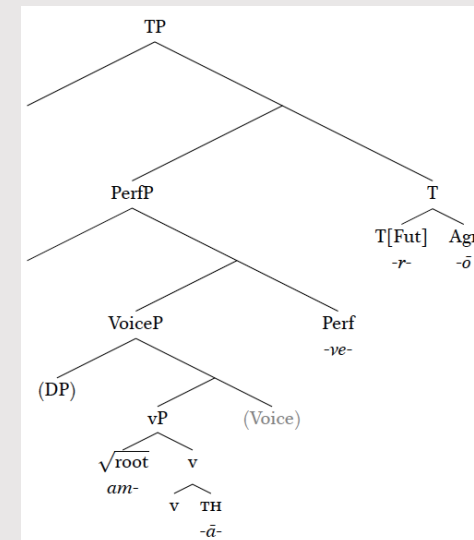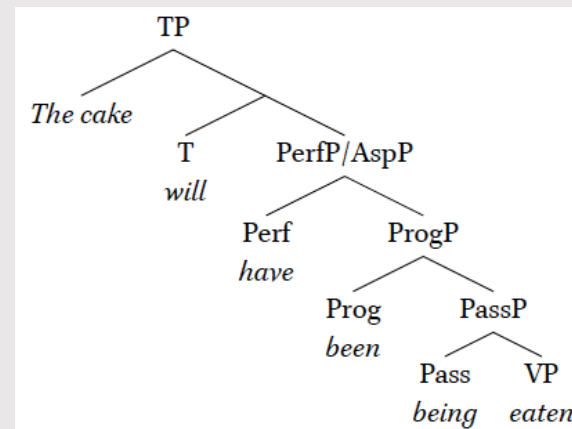
Active learning

- Class discussion based on puzzles
  - Data was introduced gradually.
  - Each step builds and motivates a formal theory (puzzle-based, e.g. Iosad et al. 2022).

- Classes were based on seminar-style discussion
  - No traditional frontal lectures.
  - No *required* textbook readings.

- The instructor directed the conversation to kinds of answers
  - The resulting theory was a variant of Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz 1993).
  - However, the journey was more important than the destination.
  - In fact, good conversations arose about syntax vs morphology.
  - Balances the instructor's goals with student agency.

Reactions

- *Most courses are significantly less interactive, while the heavily discussion-based nature of this course more or less forces us to interact with the course materials for three hours a week. Definitely a plus!*

- *I like this one. It emphasises the importance of (free) discussion and engagement which you normally don't have in other courses and the bottom-up control students had in this course*

- *I am growing a lot in this course, because I am not used to classroom discussions. There always seems to be one perspective I was not aware of. It builds up my critical thinking and leads away from the linear teachings I have experienced so far.*

Active learning: Small groups
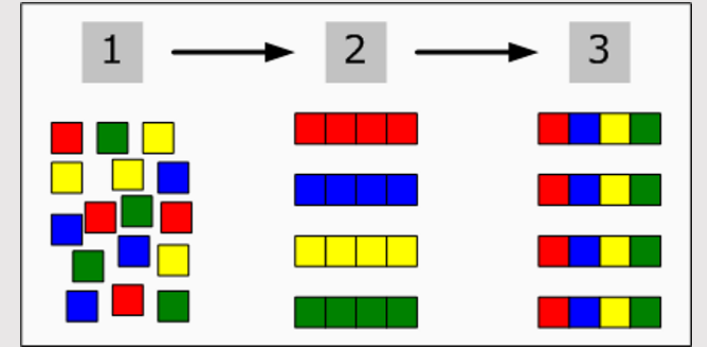
- Large emphasis on work in small groups.

- "*Peers may be better able than expert teachers to explain* concepts in familiar terms" (Tullis and Goldstone 2020).

- Students with different background knowledge worked on problem sets together (Mazur 1997).

- A particularly popular method was the *jigsaw classroom* (Aronson and Patnoe 1997) or *Expertenrunde*.

  - Stage 1: each expert group gets a sheet with something to figure out or discuss (e.g. different statistical tests: t-test, chi-squared, ANOVA).
  - Stage 2: members of different expert group form new jigsaw groups. Each student then has distinct knowledge to share with the new group.
  - The new group then discusses together (e.g. when to use which test).
  - Students explicitly requested more of this, so more jigsaws were introduced.

Reactions

- *I think it still feels "safer" than participating in the class-wide discussion. Because when I speak to a small group or to one person, I can ask them to elaborate on certain things I find particularly interesting or an idea they brought up which I am not familiar with.*

- *I do think that the different areas of experties of each student help building up discussions and together, with a view from a different perspective of each of us, we support each other in building valid ideas and concepts in the classroom.*

Active learning: Group projects

- Students were divided into groups for group projects.

- The projects were open-ended ("unessays"; Cordell 2015, Kastner and Zhao 2022).
  - No restriction on content.
  - No restriction on format.
  - Ideas and scope discussed together with the instructor.

- Work on the group projects was embedded into the classroom sessions.
  - *Scaffold* the task: break it down into steps.
  - General session on group projects.
  - Sessions for students from different groups to tell each other about their projects and provide feedback (not evaluation).
  - Final sessions of the semester devoted to group presentations.

Verb structure of Takale Kham

▶ Template: $\boxed{A;S.1;2}$ — $\boxed{T_1}$ — $\boxed{O_1.3}$ — $\boxed{O_2.3}$ — $\boxed{STEM}$ — $\boxed{O.1;2}$ — $\boxed{T_2}$ — $\boxed{A;S.3}$ — $\boxed{T_3}$

▶ Persons:

A;S.1;2		$O_{1,2}.3$		O.1;2	
S;A.1SG	ŋa-			O.1SG	-na
				O.1DU	$\begin{cases} \text{-sin} & \text{A.SG;3} \\ \text{-si} & \text{A.}\overline{\text{SG}}\text{;3} \end{cases}$
				O.1PL	-si
				O.2SG	-ni
				O.2DU	$\begin{cases} \text{-cin} & \text{A.}\overline{\text{1PL}} \\ \text{-ci} & \text{A.1PL} \end{cases}$
				O.2PL	-ci

SG]

Joel Jeffrey @joeljeffrey

ob interview]

viewer: Do you have a police rd?

No. But I do have a few of their ms on cassette

es me instantly

Folk Etymology
noun
when incomprehensible parts of a word or phrase are replaced with more familiar items, adding apparent meaning.

---

lawful good	neutral good	chaotic good
"screen" already has a past participle, use that	maybe it's Proto-Germanic/PIE like bite > bitten	syntactical inversion is always fun!
screenedshot	screenshotten	shotscreened

lawful neutral	true neutral	chaotic neutral
treat it like it's foreign and just slap a suffix on	it's an irregular verb that doesn't change with tense	this is already the past participle, and the base should be "screenshoot"
screenshotted	screenshot	screenshot

lawful evil	neutral evil	chaotic evil
allow me to suggest a compromise that nobody will like	i have seen > i saw i have screen > i scraw	idk, ablauts?
screenedshotted	scrawshot	scranshat

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hamburger hamhamham burburbur

gergerger hambur burgerham

hamger gerburger u

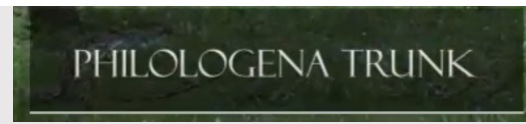uuuuuuu ur geru

Backformation

Derivational Morphology

The Distributed Morphca

An introduction to Distributed Morphology. Also a podcast.

Episode I: Lonely Morphemes in a DMless World

PHILOLOGENA TRUNK

Blend Category 2: Jeans

Jouch

Now we have seen several cutlery blends, and learned a little about their structure. Let us take a short break on the...JOUCH!

COME CUDDLE ON THE JOUCH

Pat Dubois 🇺🇦 @patdubois

patiently waiting for the jouch to make a comeback

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fst2dernet [Public]

⑂ main ▾   ⑂ 1 branch

Reactions

- *this project was a massive organizational challenge and* *I've become far more comfortable dealing with people*, *both as it relates to collaboration and more external people work like liaising.*

- *Then there's the group project --* *life is a group project, and any experience in working with other people helps* *with that.*

- *I also put significantly more work into the final project than I normally do* *for an essay-type final, just in terms of raw hours.*

Ungrading

- As mentioned earlier, the value of grades for teaching is seriously contested.
- The alternative: *ungrading*.
  - Focus on feedback, risk-taking and collaboration, not competition.
- Scaffolding and collaboration: devoted a session in week 2 to what students wanted to get out of their degree and this course, and to marks.
  - Students reflected and established that this construct is detrimental to learning.
  - We resolved as a class that the course would be *self-assessed*.
- We all found this way of doing things more fulfilling than traditional assessment and marking.
  - Allowed students to follow their intrinsic motivation.
  - Freeing the instructor to focus on feedback and support, rather than policing and compliance.

Ungrading

- Shift the focus towards learning and growth.
- Shift the focus away from grading.

Assessment structure

What we want to evaluate:

- What we've learned and how we've grown (portfolio: reflections)
- How well we've learned the skills (portfolio: exercises)
- How we can apply the new knowledge (project)

Accordingly, self-assessment will rely onthe following:

- Portfolio (Learn Journal) with self-reflection and answers to exercises
- Self-evaluations at midterm and end of semester
- Group project (any medium, can be creative) - devote time to this in class some Thursdays

1. Evaluate what we've learned and how we've grown: private online journal ("portfolio")
   - Students were asked to post a *reflection* after each class.
   - The instructor commented on the entry, and students could also reply.
   - The instructor also posted his own reflections for the class to see (and comment on).
   - Self-evaluation questionnaires at the midterm and end of semester.

2. Check how well we learned it: exercises
   - Rather than being assessed, formed the starting point for discussion in the following class (e.g. English/Latin).
   - Answered in the portfolio.

3. How can we apply the new knowledge: open-ended group projects

- With scaffolding and communication throughout the semester, plus a final "exit interview".

Reactions

- *I feel like the students are being treated as equals, but not in an artificial way.*

- *I definitely would love if more courses put the student learning as their main priority because sometimes the mark of an essay or an exam do not necessarily fully show the effort that was put behind it*

- *But genuinly I think it's been a very nice experience to do a course where it really didn't feel like the point of what you were doing was to get marked, it felt like a very different experience and I think if more people had that it would lead more people to question whether we even need marks in the first place.*

- *Actually, now that I'm reflecting, I think the fact that the current and various future topics don't matter for assessment motivates me even more to engage and learn. It's a freeing feeling and I return doing linguistics purely because of how fun and fascinating it is.*

Morphology

- A course in theory building: the theory was developed together with the students.
- Materials are being uploaded (https://github.com/itamarkast/UoEmorphology/).
- The course plan was agreed on together with the students.
  - Critical examination of "a word".
  - Morphemes and their effects in different parts of the grammar.
  - Inflection and derivation (reductionist approach; McGinnis and Wood, to appear).
  - Affix ordering (Mirror Principle; Muysken 1981, Baker 1985).
  - Allomorphy (based on the syntactic structure; Bobaljik 2000, Embick 2010).
  - Argument structure.
  - Lexical semantics.
  - Lexical processing
  - (Computational modelling, acquisition – dropped due to strike)
- Room for improvisation and for following up on student interests.

Morphology

- Scope in English:
  - T > Perf > Prog > Pass > V.
- Scope in Latin:
  - V < Th < Perf < T.
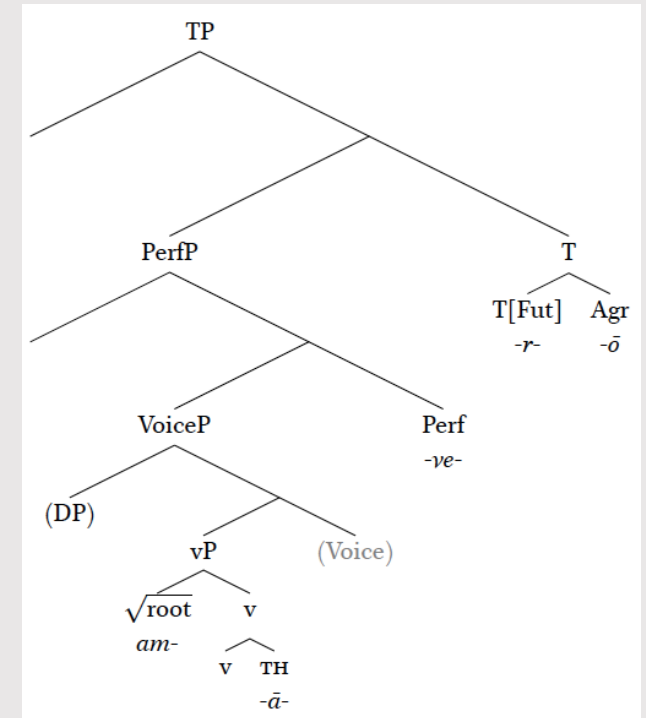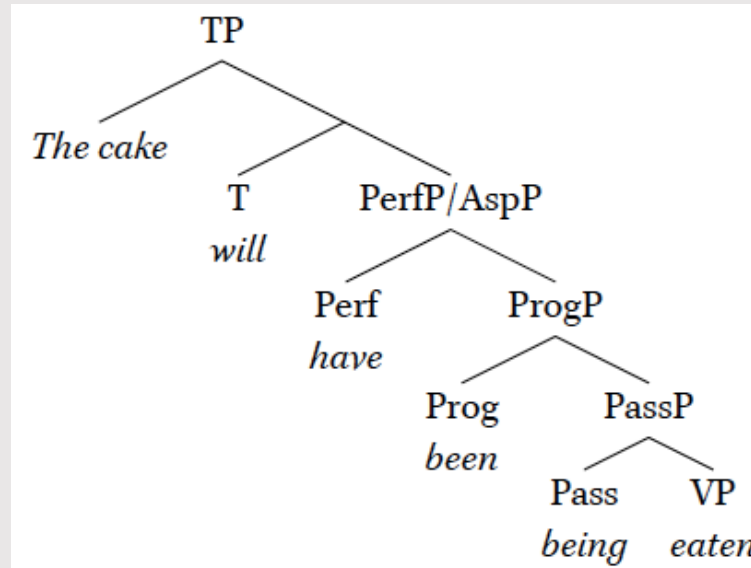
- A few weeks later, in allomorphy, we saw that Perf conditions allomorphy on T (and discussed what can't happen).
- The point was not "DM is correct"!
  - Observation → Generalization → Formal desiderata → Formalization
  - "What generalizations do we find and how can we make derive them?"
  - "What kind of theory can combine the things we're finding out about syntax, semantics and phonology?"

Reactions

- *Especially the relationship between morphology and syntax, eg. parallels and bidirectional conditioning, has really brought my understanding of morphology to a different level. Where I would have vague intuitions, maybe some basic knowledge before, I already see much more clearly and precisely ways in which morphology draws strings between phonology, syntax and semantics while existing in its own right (and being incredibly diverse)*

- *I understand better how closely connected different levels of linguistic study are and how there are rarely if ever clear cut boundaries in between. I have gained better understanding of how philosophical linguistics can be at the same time as scientific and how this can be useful.*

- *It's also given me a sense of how people build theoretical frameworks in morphology, and what something "being" a theory of morphology even means.*

Discussion: What worked well

- Important to scaffold as much as possible (Ge and Land 2003):
  - We ask students to write essays, work with data, evaluate arguments, build theories, work in groups, assess their own progress, etc etc.
  - We need to show them how this is done.
  - Need to signal what's important.

- A lot of structure and planning, like in any course.

- Clear expectations about marks and participation early on.

- The more agency students got, the better they reacted.

Discussion: Challenges

- A lot of structure and planning, like in any course.
    - However, this structure was not always clear to the students.
    - The semi-freeform discussion led, at times, to distracting tangents.
    - Open discussion and the reflections meant that we could fix things on the go.
- Need to get better at working with neurodiverse populations.
    - Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation might balance out differently for different populations.
    - Again, made aware of by the students themselves and was addressed much earlier than with a typical mid-semester or end-of-semester evaluation questionnaire.
- Bureaucratic aspects
    - Board of studies, extensions and special circumstances, etc etc etc
- The more agency students got, the better they reacted.
    - But it was not easy to relinquish control.

Reactions

- *I am no disciple of standardized testing in any way and I very much appreciate the fact that the ungrading scheme takes a lot of stress off the students in this course, but I think I personally was a bit too un-stressed and ended up forgetting about exercises and reflections a bit too often*

- *I am so bad at the jigsaws (and group discussions). Don't get me wrong, they're very fun (the jigsaws), but the system requirements exceed my RAM.*

- *I think that the breadth of linguistic knowledge in the classroom has sometimes not allowed me to feel confident enough to contribute. I feel that sometimes bigger personalities in the classroom overshadow some people who are less confident about contributing. In the group activities, however, I feel that my contribution has been useful and allowed my groups to facilitate useful discussion.*

- *One thing I think this course would benefit from is separation between discussion and lecture at some points. At times I think the material that was supposed to be discussed was ignored in favor of discussions that went off topic. More separation between listening and talking would have been helpful for me.*

Discussion: But how?

- "This sounds like a lot of work!"

- Trying something new
  - Trust yourself.
  - Trust that the students will recognise what you're trying to do.

- Workload
  - "Doesn't it take ages to comment on all these journal entries?"
  - First, it never felt like work. It was all worthwhile.
  - Second, I calculated that all feedback took about 2/3 of the time that we're usually allotted for marking (which is 90min/student).
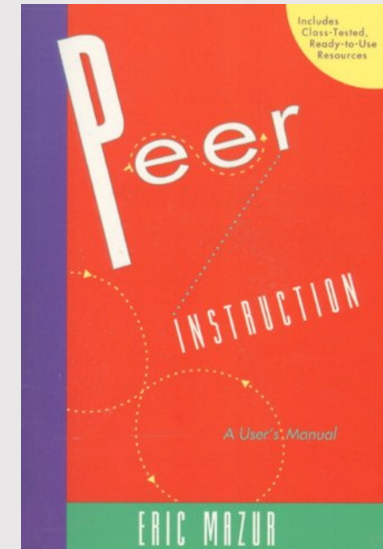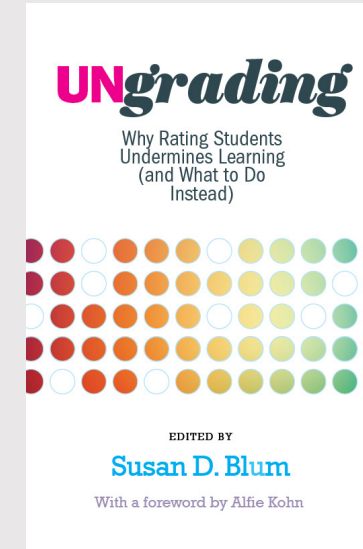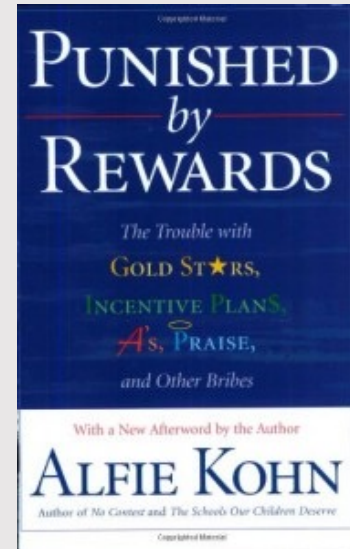
Reactions

- *I would not change the way it is and I think that if it had been planned more similar to a 'regular' course, it would not have been as enriching as it was. This is proven in the fact that I have never been part of a group of students that motivated and engaged in their own learning than in this one, which really shocked me in the best way possible.*

- *I think both the more person-centred approach to grading and the interactive classroom atmosphere are things other courses could benefit from.*

- *I have become much better at seeking out information on my own, as this course did not entail a lot of assigned reading but rather allowed students to look as deep as they wanted to when given a certain topic. Though this was more difficult for me in the beginning of the semester, I was eventually able to see how reading up on differing viewpoints of an issue allowed me to better understand and discuss it.*

Conclusion 1: You do you

- Different aspects can be useful for different courses
  - Peer instruction
  - Theory building
  - Small groups
  - Jigsaw puzzles
  - Self-assessment
  - Reflections
  - Unessays
  - Group projects
  - (Tutorials, clickers, skills-based grading, contract grading…)

- The scholarship is out there
  - Often useful to try a "plus-one" approach (Behling and Tobin 2018).

- More and more case studies are out there, also in linguistics

ENGAGING SYNTAX: USING A PERSONAL RESPONSE
SYSTEM TO ENCOURAGE GRAMMATICAL THOUGHT

DAVID W. MARLOW, *University of South Carolina–Upstate*

TEACHING LINGUISTICS

Gotta catch 'em all:
Skills grading in undergraduate linguistics

KIE ZURAW

University of California, Los Angeles

ANN M. ALY

Agile Six

ISABELLE LIN

*University of California, Los Angeles*

ADAM J. ROYER

University of California, Los Angeles

IMPLEMENTING SKILLS-BASED GRADING
IN A LINGUISTICS COURSE

MAURA O'LEARY, *University of California, Los Angeles*
RICHARD STOCKWELL, *Christ Church, University of Oxford*

Conclusion 2: Structural issues

- The scholarship is out there…

- … but our institutions don't give staff time and freedom to learn from it, or to experiment.
  - Learning isn't *really* a priority for our institutions.
  - It is for us though, so we should think about our responsibility as individuals and collectively.

- Final thoughts:
  - We didn't reinvent the wheel.
  - We just experimented with ways of giving students agency over their own learning.
  - Plenty to develop and discuss further!
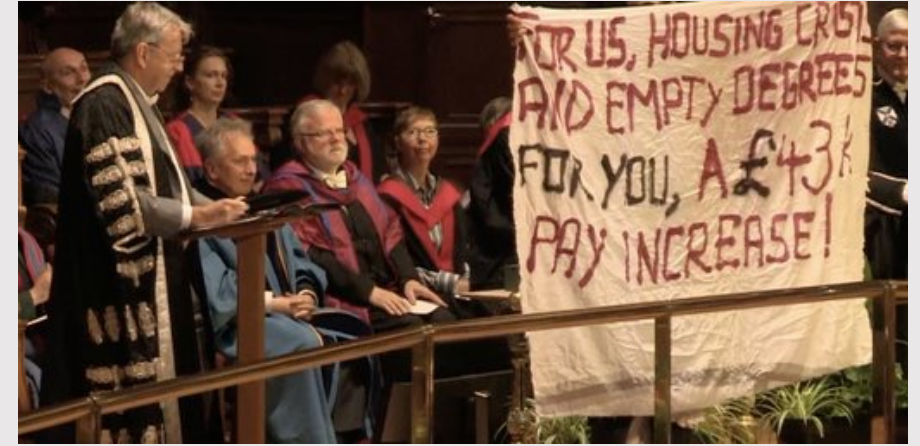
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- Special thanks to Laura, Sig, Theis and Ziche for help with the presentation.

What's our mission?

Provide structures for students to grow as scholars and people

We want students to ask:

"What did I learn?"

We want staff to ask:

"How can I help?"

Focus is on feedback

Or: Rank students against each other

We encourage students to ask:

"How many points did I get?"

We make staff ask:

"How can I ensure compliance?"

Focus is on grades

(Freire 1968, Purpel 1988, hooks 1994, Sackstein 2015, Gannon 2020, etc)

Self-evaluation questionnaire (sample)

- We've had 19 sessions. Of these, I attended: virtually all / most / some / hardly any
- This also means that I was asked to write just under 20 self-reflections. I submitted: virtually all / most / some / hardly any
- What has changed in my thinking about linguistics?
- How would I describe my participation in class activities? Am I happy with it?
- In what ways have I grown intellectually?
- Is there anything I'm particularly proud of? Why?
- Is there anything I want to work on in the future? How?
- Are there ways in which I wish this course were more like other ones?
- Are there ways in which I wish other courses were more like this one?
- How would I describe my role and participation in the group project? Am I happy with it?
- What did I learn from working on this project (in terms of content, skills, or both)?

(h/t Julie Cupples)

Grading for Growth

My first experiment with ungrading: Final review

DAVID CLARK
3 JAN 2022

So, what did I notice about *learning*? **Students learned *a lot*, and they improved *significantly* during the semester.** This is a class where I try to help students move from a rigid, "there's only one way to do it and there's always one correct answer" approach to math into a more nuanced view. They learn about the subtleties of mathematical argument by presenting to each other in class. They learn why high school geometry is the way it is, but they also discover that there isn't just one correct set of "rules": Mathematicians can choose the rules of geometry, follow them to their logical ends, and build entirely new worlds through these choices.[1] This is a class full of *big*, challenging ideas.

Out of the Math Box!

Activities, Writings, and Videos by Debra K. Borkovitz

https://debraborkovitz.com/2022/03/ungrading-in-discrete-math-with-lots-of-context/

they may not be used to. I find it tragic that we would bring together so many fascinating young people from all over the world and just have them write down what I say, rather than talk to each other. Students often start out skeptical about working together, but that usually fades quickly — they want to connect. When there is a clear, somewhat predictable path to the grade they

More ungrading reactions

- *Over my time at uni I have got some fairly average marks for assignments I've put a lot of effort into, and high marks for other assignments which I didn't put much effort into at all.*

- *I definitely would love if more courses put the student learning as their main priority because sometimes the mark of an essay or an exam do not necessarily fully show the effort that was put behind it, which can feel demotivating and frustrating.*

- *Despite the high workload, none of the components of this course came with an especially high level of stress or urgency. I attribute this to the ungrading approach. A significant part of the stress and worry associated with undergrad academia is rooted in deadlines and the numbers associated with grades. The major issue with these things is that they're unyielding and, to a significant degree, out of one's own control. Ungrading releases a lot of this tension. This has been very valuable for me personally.*

- *I think the fact that the current and various future topics don't matter for assessment motivates me even more to engage and learn. It's a freeing feeling and I return doing linguistics purely because of how fun and fascinating it is. This course is definitely nourishing that.*

Even more ungrading reactions

- *I generally did very well in school without really trying too hard and was praised by my family and peers for that and so like for many others, it became part of how I defined my worth. Then half way through high school [a personal event happened] which predictably affected my grades quite negatively that year, especially my 'year grades' which were like marking our engagement through the year, homework, assignments and such, as opposed to our exam grades. And I remember being so angry at my teachers being very kind and understanding to my face but then marking me so badly for my (lack of) ability to ignore my personal life and focus on school.*

- *When taking calculus in high school I remember there was a quiz that all of the students had to get a 80% or more on to be able to move on to the next unit. The quiz had to be completed within 10 minutes and students would have to keep taking it until they had an 80% regardless of whether or not the class was about to move on. I remember being one of the last students to complete the quiz, as someone who has always struggled with doing math under pressure, and the embarrassment I felt at being told in front of the whole class that I had failed again.*