

Slowing Down Learning

why people came to the session • their exp have been w/ slowing down learning

Ron Liu: spending time in his teaching thinking about what he might make more efficient and what he can accelerate, and what ought to be slow + deep; what to make fast so we can get to slow

Lamont lib: the pleasure of going slow vs. the grab + go mentality (in research, e.g.); encouraging students to go slow and enjoy experience

ML: anecdote 1 — watching a movie on their own, a student who got impatient with VHS rewinding went back to dorm + Netflixed

2 — going to Houghton to see some pre-selected documents people had to pick one doc + curate it
some students complained about 2 days being too much

JR: the talk she gave about making students look at a painting for 2-3 hours before research;
struggling with how to make deep attention
something that pervades the semester
the tradeoffs of cutting quantity of content
how to integrate making activities into the curriculum as something that makes students slow down + face temporalities of stone, wood, etc. (other than their own)

culture of rush + busyness we subscribe to every day has to be confronted

Harvard culture particularly has no checks on time pressures or to over subscribe, over commit

TF at ed school: students work on independent capstone project
stakes are a little higher than a grade, but it is self-directed
balancing the sense of frustration + ambiguity w/
Scaffolding so students are not totally overwhelmed
Strategies: encouraging community, and teaching
the skill of project management

CT, from HSPT: She took two art classes, drawing +
animation — assignments in repetition that seemed
boring but whose purpose eventually seemed clear
iterative quality, time to practice, is important

critical theory seminar teacher: first draft readings, reading
as process; doing a first, second, and third reading;

pre-college summer: freeing to be in a non-credit
comp. sci. program environment so that students
could take as much time as they need
per subject/skill/area

RL: find the thing that allows you to live outside of time
owning what's happening so much that you don't feel it
"is it so much slow, or is it being outside of someone's
timeframe?" or: is it a question of density?
density/agency frame

JR: one of the challenges is convincing students that there is a value in another approach: "slowness" implies nostalgia, retrenchment, a loosening of intensity; she tries to present it as a question of "resolution" or "rigor" using the vocab that they can understand

analogy to slow food movement: authenticity + nutrition + hipster craft
looking at Renaissance text: they want to look for labels + shortcuts rather than the thing itself; slow is not against fast but against substitution

Frustration makes kids want to give up; they don't want to sit in the discomfort → can it be positive? (that experience?)

what is the solution: to make them sit or to let them to take a break

Portuguese language: students get frustrated when attempting to share ideas in a foreign language

ML: gen ed class is offered a 3-hour final where they only have to answer one essay question → some love it and others can't handle it and just spew, despite her encouragement to re-write if they want
she can't coach in the middle of a final exam, so do people have tools for coaching in advance?

perhaps reiterating the ~~eff~~ grounds of evaluation would help?

JE: we give fewer + fewer exams
give people different kinds of examples of good past answers - that might help

Sometimes a rubric helps, outlining the features of what you are looking for; gets them in the habit of looking at quality you are trying to achieve rather than focusing on the time.

taking the time for peer editing can also be pedagogically useful

RL: ambivalent about the exam because they have never had practice → maybe taking a 1-hr section so they have experience with that intensity of experience in the summative assignment, so they can be coached then

JE: talking about the time it takes to study
students seem to spend much less time studying, per week, and more time with socialization
though studies also say time only loosely correlates w/ achievement of skills
also: value added at end of 4 years of college is less than we might hope

many jobs are being automated — areas with growth are those with STEM skills + aspects of analytic, humanistic, empathetic thinking

how does all this tie in with assessment?

enormous amount of grade inflation, and grade compression at the very top — poses a problem in trying to motivate students at the lower end

ML: conversely, how to get students who excel to push themselves

so: eliminate... grading? ~~if~~

we have all these really great crammers who don't retain information

Students vying in SEAS to be teaching assistants seem to benefit: then they're not vying for grades but the opportunity to be asked questions

ML: misconception in humanities that it is so personal that there can't be peer evaluation

Students are eager to find consensus

JR: in SEAS there might be a clearer sequence of skills whereas pedagogical sequences are not as clear in the humanities

we can't agree what to teach + in what order
(in history of art) — a challenge b/c overcoming
frustration is very hard because we don't have
a clear idea of graduated mastery

RL: the value of having peers + peer learning
in freshman life sciences 2A — they don't have
TAs but facilitators with study networks,
which is about learning processes; they are not
supposed to be authorities

first they brought in students who earned high As,
who it turned out were least able to explain process

teaching writing in writing seminars is ~~artificial~~ artificial,
maybe: that one course was not inoculating them
against writing; in academic professional lives, writing
is contextualized as a mode of communication
among colleagues

writing can be taught via annotating text (rather
than imitating text) — ~~is~~ drawing attention to
choices the writer is making

JE: students graduate into a world where problems
aren't solved by taking information + plugging it
in; what people ought to learn (but perhaps don't)
is judgment: thinking through something intensely,
as well as acquiring skills + content

the answers are not already known

appreciating the strengths + limitations of disciplinary formation → is the solution broad exposure or going so deep you end up with humility on the other side

Some courses are team-taught with that in mind

business + design schools actually do some good work around this: how do you use your expertise, but let your mind go to use another discipline as a lens for self-critique?

takeaways:

1: cutting down on time on writing in favor of re-writing — maybe it is time to cut out some of the reading, because it is not working

2: students at biz school tend to just want the ~~the~~ answer from the library → maybe should have them do it themselves

3: exec education at ed school can take place over days, not a semester — so, how to restructure?

4: part of learning is self-discovery, so slowing down is helpful