Teaching analysis

1. Introduction

This self-analysis has been written in accordance with the procedure for teacher professionalization as outlined by the School of Psychology and Artificial Intelligence of the faculty of Social Sciences of Radboud University in October 2008. After perusing the file on teacher qualifications, the goals, and final attainment levels of the Bachelor’s and Master’s programs of psychology as formulated by the examination regulations (OER), I have taken stock and given account of my activities as a lecturer in terms of implementation of teaching, development of course material and educational organisation. Table 1 gives an overview of these, and will be the point of reference for the teaching analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BM</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>OER</th>
<th>Per.</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>TF</th>
<th># Stud.</th>
<th>BB</th>
<th>Dom.</th>
<th>Examination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Practical Developmental Psychology*</td>
<td>K, S</td>
<td>01-07</td>
<td>C, S</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>45-50</td>
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<td>Im, Or</td>
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<td>B1</td>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>K, S</td>
<td>06-08</td>
<td>T, S</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>30-45</td>
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<td>Im, Dv</td>
<td>No: T(oq), Pa, Pr, AP</td>
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<td>Research Practical 1</td>
<td>K, S</td>
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<td>D, S</td>
<td>P</td>
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<td>No: Pa, Pr, AP</td>
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<td>B1</td>
<td>Domain Course ‘Person’</td>
<td>K</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>L, S</td>
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<td>Psychology of Morality</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>07-</td>
<td>T, S</td>
<td>L, S</td>
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<td>Psychology of Magic</td>
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<td>07-09</td>
<td>O, D</td>
<td>L, S</td>
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<td>B3</td>
<td>Bachelor’s thesis Psychology of Culture and Religion</td>
<td>K, S, A</td>
<td>06-09</td>
<td>O, T</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>10-15</td>
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<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Practical Research Methods</td>
<td>K, S</td>
<td>07-08</td>
<td>T</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>No: Pr, AP</td>
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<td>25-30</td>
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<td>Internship and Master’s thesis Psychology of Culture and Religion</td>
<td>K, S, A</td>
<td>08-</td>
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</table>

*Because I already had a coordinating role as an assistant, developing teaching material and chairing ‘intervisions’ (peer review meetings) I have included these here.

Key
- **BM** = Place in Bachelor/Master structure *Number denotes year*
- **Course** = Name of the course
- **OER** = Final attainment level OER: K = insight/Knowledge, S = Skills, A = Attitude
- **Per.** = Period of participation
- **Role**: O = Owner, C = Coordinator, T = Teacher, S = Seminar tutor
- **TF** = Teaching format: L = Lecture, S = Seminar, P = Practical, I = individual supervision
- **# Stud.** = Number of participating students
- **BB** = Course environment on Blackboard
- **Dom.** = Domain: Im = Implementation, Dv = Development, Or = Organisation
- **Examination**: Yes = Has (co)developed examination, No = not involved in development of examination; T(mc) = test (multiple choice), T(oq) = Test (open questions), As = Assignments, Pa = Paper, Pr= Presentation, Ap = Active participation
2. Implementation of teaching

Since 2001, when I started with my assistantships, I have been involved with the implementation of academic teaching. In the performance of my duties back then, with some ten different bachelor’s courses, I was already encountering many of the aspects that come with teaching: tutoring, coordinating, correcting, and the formulation of assignments. The broad array of skills which I acquired has grown further since I became a teacher. Because of my gradual and natural growth from assistant to lecturer I have always been able to keep up a good working relationship with students, which fitted in well with the combined teacher/tutor job I had in the courses ‘Academic Skills’ and ‘Research Practical 1’. In my daily work and through my enthusiasm I have always tried to cultivate an intrinsic motivation in my students. My philosophy has always been that profundity and pleasure are not at odds with each other, but that the former can contribute to the latter.

On the one hand, pertaining to the transfer of knowledge, I always try to tie in the subject matter with current affairs (or ask students to do that in an assignment). In doing this, I try to show students that psychology is a discipline that is relevant to many phenomena that play a role in our daily lives. Two good examples in this regard are the courses ‘Psychology of Morality’ and ‘Psychology of Magic’. The latter, for instance, is always an eye opener for students to discover that magic is not an exotic or ‘obsolete’ phenomenon, but that our daily behavioural practice is permeated with it, as is proven by issues like superstition and irrational thinking.

On the other hand, I always try to uncover the theoretical foundations of the subject matter at hand. This point also touches upon the development of teaching (q.v.). In the implementation of teaching I bring these to the fore in discussing the tensions between different approaches, the historical development of the field, and touching on the underlying paradigms. My rationale for this perspective is that one does not solely need to supply students with knowledge, but should offer a framework or roadmap with which they can grasp the interrelations between phenomena, data, theories, researchers, schools and fields.

3. Development of course material

Beyond the renewed educational structure that has been rolled out in the last few years, the old curriculum still had to be taught. I have made productive use of this short episode of extra possibilities in my development as a teacher: personal growth through the development of course material. I have invested a lot of spare time in the renewal of the course ‘Bachelor’s Thesis Psychology of Culture and Religion’, which I later also implemented in the course ‘Bachelor’s Thesis Developmental Psychology’. I have included a much needed training in writing skills in these courses, emphasising self-reliance. In addition, I have tackled the issue of common mistakes in students by formulating assignments of self-reflection, outlining and structuring, offered two lectures and introduced a format of intensive supervision at the start (helping them to get started). Besides helping students to acquire in-depth knowledge of a particular subject area, I have taught the students the skill of managing a large project, by streamlining the required tasks they have to undertake, and letting them explicate their goals. In this fashion I made the bachelor’s thesis truly into a full rehearsal for the master’s thesis; one that
keeps its use regardless of any changes of subject between the bachelor’s and master’s phase.

Beside the conviction that there is need for a curricular and skill-based consistency between the different courses, I have always stressed the importance of an academic attitude. My idea here is that such an attitude not only encompasses being able to show what you know (tests), being able to show what you can do (i.e. what your research skills are), but also being able to show what you think. A good example is the course ‘Psychology of Magic’ I rebuilt from the ground up. For this course I not only compiled an altogether new reading list, but also made a new layout, formulated new teaching goals, and wrote new assignments and associated answer models (for the grading assistants). In this course I specifically asked students to be critical in their digestion of knowledge: a mere paraphrase of what they learned and read was not enough, but needed to be complemented with sound argumentation. Furthermore I trained students to demonstrate the connections between the different theories on the subject. This approach is related to the one that I employed with the bachelor’s thesis courses, where the students were urged to demonstrate during their writing process why, given their research questions, particular theories and methods are more useful, logical, broader, more exact and so forth, than others. In this fashion, not only the internal structure of the subject area becomes clearer, but also the student is trained in reasoning with regard to scientific questions. He or she practices becoming an autonomous thinker – a quality that does not get enough attention in the present curriculum, yet for which I always aim.

A last point of importance in emphasising theoretical foundations, is factually letting other disciplines and psychology interpenetrate, and showing the topical relatedness of the different fields of study. That is the very reason of the interdisciplinary approach in the course ‘Psychology of Magic’. Where my emphasis on teaching autonomous thinking perhaps is complementary to the wider curriculum, the emphasis on interdisciplinarity is wholly concordant with it.

4. Educational organisation

Strangely enough I already made the first steps in the area of the educational organisation when I got a coordinating role with the ‘Practical Developmental Psychology’ in the so-called ‘intervisions’ (i.e. peer review meetings) from my second assistantship in 2002 until my graduation in 2006. At the time, together with my partner (who was also an assistant then), I authored the so-called ‘Begeleidraad’: a syllabus in the form of a loose-leaf system that acted as a tutor guide for the assistants of the practical, which not only contained the scenarios for each meeting, but also background information about the measuring instruments that were discussed during the course, and also a number of examples to do small studies during the meetings. Alongside these, the system also contained examples of best practice for tutoring students, and had an elaborate appendix containing course material such as sheets, pen-and-paper tests, and standardized forms to aid the monitoring of students’ development and of the small groups in which they did their research assignments.

When I became a teacher in the course ‘Academic Skills’ straight after my graduation, a position I held for two years, I took part in the weekly ‘intervisions’ (peer review meetings), where I made a case for augmenting and updating the course itself, and a better fit with courses like ‘Psychology in Action’. Although it was tongue-in-cheek, my nick
name ‘glib guard dog’ is informative with regard to my pragmatism. A pragmatism that showed not only a no-nonsense attitude towards teachers’ meetings, but even more so in my orientation towards workable solutions and getting the job done. My proposal for starting to work in small task forces inside the teachers’ group to improve upon our own performance and course material was eventually implemented by the course coordinators. The same goes for my idea to improve upon the curricular link between ‘Academic Skills’ and ‘Psychology in Action’, so that both courses mutually support each other, taking on board the critique of students about unclear objectives, and the lack of coherence between and within both courses.

Another aspect that belongs to the organisation of teaching, is the development, together with Milena Feldkamp, of the evaluation of the course Academic Skills. Under supervision of the IOWO we constructed a comprehensive evaluation for the first edition of the course, keeping in mind the educational requirements.