

FINAL REPORT

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TS at Amherst College, Massachusetts USA, Spring 2022

Preparation and planning

In very good time before my trip to the US I got in contact with the chair of the philosophy department in Amherst, Alexander George and with Janet Tobin. They were both very helpful in practical matters, such as regarding housing, finding schools and so forth. I also had a meeting with earlier STINT-fellow at Amherst college, Lisa Folkmarsson Käll to get information about what to expect and what was expected of me. Then my trip was postponed three semesters which meant that I was in contact with George and Tobin for a long time. But they had patience and were helpful every time we hoped to be able to go. Finally, we were able to go, but without a planning trip, so we had to do all the planning and preparations on distance. But this went well, there were no significant problems. I found good but rather expensive housing through Tobin.

I came up with a course proposal which I discussed with A. George, he gave me input and we found a compromise. My initial proposal was more specific, about the philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno in which I specialize, and the ultimate choice was more broad and possibly attractive to more students. The course was named “The Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School”, including theories of Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth and others, and was a historical reconstruction of the theoretical development of the Frankfurt school and its different generations. I also included Angela Davis in the reading list since she was a student of Adorno and Marcuse during the 1960s, and with the purpose to break the male dominated history of the Frankfurt school.

I planned the course within a couple of months before the trip, trying to offer the students a broad picture of the history of the Frankfurt school and its thinkers. This involves to read and decipher a lot of different type of texts, with different styles and questions. Even though the Frankfurt school is considered to be a somewhat unified tradition there are significant differences between the different generations. For instance, the difference between Adorno and Habermas is almost fundamental, so it was important to both sketch a line of development but also make visible these inner conflicts. In addition, since especially the first generation developed a fundamental critique of modern society and, for instance, its

scientism, I was not sure what reaction to expect from the students. But this did not turn out to become a problem. Rather the opposite, they seemed very interested in the critical perspectives offered. One student even told me he had started to question his choice of major, which I think was mathematics. He had been so influenced by Horkheimer and Adorno's criticism of science, mathematics and formal logic (and the political implications of this criticism) so he had to make up his mind once again.

I conducted the course all by myself, and when I had practical questions about, for instance, what the students would expect in different aspects I asked George. I chose all the readings for the course and was put in contact with the library which was very helpful. They uploaded readings on the student intranet "Moodle". The secretary at the department was also very helpful in practical aspects. I received help about how to write a syllabus, with grading guidelines etc., but as in many other aspects, every teacher did it their own way without any commonly formulated criteria. There was nothing expected of me other than giving my course, so I worked mainly in solitude. The department invited me to but did not expect me to visit the weekly department meetings, but I did so anyway, which was very interesting and made several comparisons possible between the department in Amherst and my home department in Sweden. The relation with the colleagues I think also still was marked by covid, so there was not much every day contacts between meetings.

Activities during the Teaching Sabbatical

I had planned my course very well before my stay in Amherst and I then gave two combined lectures/seminars every week, altogether 26 meetings. The room my course was assigned to was the old Observatory which was a very nice and special building. None of the students had ever been in it.

I also visited two other courses one time each in order to make observations of their pedagogy and get input. See more below. And I visited the *Centre for Teaching* at the college to get new perspectives on pedagogy. In addition, I contacted another teacher, at the department for Black studies, because I realized we had similar research interests. We had a very good and interesting discussion on our shared topic of interest, political protest movements. This was one essential part of my course, namely the period in which the Frankfurt school gained rather great fame in West Germany during the 1960s, a period in history during which the student movements also grew strong.

The first two weeks of the course consisted in the so called "shopping period", during which the students visit several courses before they decide which courses they choose. In the end I had seven students, all males. They had different majors, including philosophy and mathematics. They were required to have taken one philosophy course before my course. Overall, they were very good students, they were engaged in class and read the texts carefully prior to class. The discussions were advanced and when I let them act out a debate, they took

their roles very seriously. Some of the students came to my office hours in Cooper house in order to discuss the readings or assignments.

One difficulty was that face masks were always mandatory everywhere on campus (inside). It therefore became a rather big challenge to make the discussions work smoothly since I sometimes had trouble understanding the questions and comments of the students in every detail. But this of course also made me develop my English abilities, and it became easier as the semester went on. But I held on to my ambition not to have written lecture manuscripts but to improvise around certain themes I showed on power point presentations.

I was not the only STINT-fellow in Amherst during the spring semester. Political scientist Björn Hammar from Örebro university was there as well and we met a couple of times which was also very helpful. It gave me the opportunity to ask questions common for us and to make sure I was on the right track.

Important lessons

The contact between students and teacher was different in comparison with Sweden. The authority of the teacher was significantly stronger in the US than in Sweden, which made it easier to teach because I always had the attention of the students. On the other hand, this in general makes it harder for the students to develop critical thinking. But the students were very engaged and smart, and I think not afraid to critically discuss the course content.

I tried several new didactical ideas, such as having debates and letting them watch movie clips before class. The debates worked surprisingly well. The students really tried to formulate arguments in the spirit of the texts without only copying them. I also tried structuring the meetings without having a too rigid division between lecture and discussion, and to be open to what was needed in a certain situation. Is this a better time to let the discussion continue, or do I have to explain a certain concept in order to hold the course in the right direction? This was connected to an insight I had when observing one of the other teachers, namely, to avoid packing too much information into the lectures, but rather help the students to grasp one or three basic points, which then would help the students in their forthcoming readings. In the case I observed, Gottlob Frege's theory of sense and reference was the topic, and the teacher really tried to make the students stay within and dwell in the basic idea and problem that the concepts addressed. Why is this important? To what question and problem is this an answer? This is something I will develop further in my teaching.

Also, I now think that variation as such is important, the students should not know exactly what to expect from class. It is better if I catch the students a little bit off guard. But I also sometimes gave them a problem to reflect on taken from a certain reading. Hereby I gave them a little help or guiding to make the orientation in the reading a little bit more directed. Since the texts of for instance Adorno is considered to be very difficult to read and digest, I

had to give them the assignment to focus mainly on some certain passages. And this seemed to have worked. The students grasped the ideas very well and could even problematize them.

Comparison between the host and the home institution

Pedagogy and its importance

As regarding several questions which I discussed with the department, they had no common criteria or guidelines. Rather, every member of the department had their own idea and style of teaching. The individual freedom of every teacher seemed to be very important. This was also the case when it comes to teaching. The two teachers I observed were skillful but also traditional in the sense that they only conducted the teaching orally with some usage of the white board. They had very developed pedagogical approaches, combining very smoothly lecturing with discussion.

When I asked if we could have a discussion on pedagogy and didactics at a department meeting, they happily agreed, but my impression was that they seldom had these discussions. At my department in Sweden, we have more commonly developed ideas and criteria about how to design courses and common discussions about their content and the choices of readings, but we could also discuss concrete didactics more frequently. The risk now is that teaching skills remain something dark and mystical which one somehow acquires (or not).

Curriculum and courses offered

The teaching was very individual, every teacher had their own method. But everyone was expected to write a syllabus etc., but for which there was no common criteria either. The authority and individual freedom of the teachers was very valued also in this regard. This is also in some ways the case at my home department, but we have also worked a lot to create more clear criteria in several aspects, in order to avoid arbitrariness. The courses offered in Amherst were also individually constructed, without, as far as I could see, a strong common programmatic idea for the offerings as a whole.

Use of technology/IT in education

I both used the intranet "Moodle" to communicate with the students and upload material as well as power point presentations, but I know that some teachers did neither, so this varied a lot. Both teachers I observed used the white board only. In my own teaching history, I have also mainly used the white board, but since a couple of years I have started to use power point presentations. But at this point, combining my experiences from the course in Amherst and my observations of the colleagues at the college I can again see the advantages with using white board presentations. It makes the teaching more flexible and maybe more communicative between teacher and students. It is easier to react to questions and comments if needed, and also to add things regarding course content. But the intranet "Moodle" was very good and pedagogical.

Forms of examination

In this case the teachers' approaches varied as well. But it was common to grade with regards to several aspects, such as attendance, participation, and papers. I let my students write three papers and give oral presentations in class. So, in this case there were no big differences between Amherst and Södertörn.

To what extent educational programmes conform to labour market needs

It was a liberal arts program, meaning that the students are encouraged to be broad in their choices of courses (I had a couple of non-philosophy students). My impression was that many of the students begin their profession-oriented studies after college, such as at a law school.

Recommendations

The department was very welcoming and helpful, but it is good to actively show interest and ask if something is going on. They were always taking their time to answer questions but it was more up to me to seek their attention. I recommend that one discusses pedagogical questions with them, and presents a paper of one's own research... They will not ask you to, but they were very willing to do this with interest. Contact other researchers from other disciplines if you have similar research interests, in my cases they were also happy to meet and welcoming.

We had very good experience from both the Amherst high school and Crocker farm elementary school south of Amherst. I recommend these schools.

It is hard to make it without a car, but this is very expensive, so it might be worth it to make an effort and look into different ways to rent a car. Also, the nearby town Northampton is very nice and has a more urban feel, and it is possible to drive to the college Amherst from there with car. Especially if you compare it to where we lived, which was a ten-minute drive south of Amherst center.

Action plan

I will change a lot in my teaching, focus on more variation, flexibility and more focused on discussing the core questions with the students instead of just deliver loads of material. I think that my department in Sweden has developed a more continuous and common discussion on course development, pedagogy, collegial work and so on, than at my host department. And this makes me think that this is even more important to continue. The liberal arts program is more attracting to me now but also the long semester-long courses. It is a much better way to get deeper into the material and you also get to know the students better and hence you can adapt your didactical approach as you go along. I will have contact with some of the teachers, those with the most similar research interests and maybe invite them to Sweden.