

Research-based Pedagogy in the Norwegian Classroom: UCL Students' Contributions to the 2014 Celebrations

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In 2014 UCL launched its twenty-year strategy, announcing as one of its clear objectives that of becoming 'a global leader in the integration of research and education' (UCL Communications 2014: 2). As explained by the UCL Provost, Professor Michael Arthur, in the 'Provost's Long View', this means 'developing the critical independent thinking skills of our students, so that they become confident problem solvers - well versed in communicating complex information and experienced at working in a team' (Arthur 2015). Led by Dr Dilly Fung, Director for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CALT), the UCL Connected Curriculum is the framework designed to achieve this by enabling students 'to experience the challenges and achievements of researching in their subject field, and to understand and engage with research currently being undertaken by academics' (Arthur 2014). While the UCL Connected Curriculum is designed as a comprehensive institutional commitment to bring research and education closer, the ideas behind greater student participation in research and the creation of knowledge fit within the context of an integrative approach to learning according to which 'students are able to *articulate* what they are learning' and 'use "facts" (content, knowledge) as the starting point for developing knowledge claims' (Dehler and Welsh 2014: 878).

In April 2014 17 students from the School of European Languages, Culture and Society (SELCS) contributed to the conference *The Norwegian Independence and Constitution of 1814: Norway, Great*

Britain and Beyond at UCL on which the articles published in this themed issue of *Scandinavica* are based. Funded by the Research Council of Norway and co-organised by Dr Ruth Hemstad, Research Librarian at the National Library in Norway, and me the conference was – as I will discuss in this article – an opportunity for the students to take an active part in the event as equals and not just as listeners. The contributions, which took the form of short oral presentations, poster presentations, videos and a booklet, were integrated into the Norwegian language and content modules attended by the students and were devised based on the students' level and on the desired learning outcomes of the relevant courses.

The main aim of the students' engagement in the event was not so much that of moving the students from 'passive receptors of information into active knowledge constructors' – a process otherwise stimulated in the course of every class – but to change the context of this active construction from the classroom to a research arena, represented in this case by an academic conference (Dehler and Welsh 2014: 883). In his article on engaging students in historical research, Keith A. Erikson highlights the importance of identifying 'a public need that exists outside of the context of the course' and communicating this need to the students in order to shape the outcome of their engagement (Erikson 2015: 390-391). The activities and events organised at UCL for the Bicentenary of the Norwegian Constitution in 2014 appeared, therefore, as a very suitable occasion to provide students studying Norwegian language and culture outside Norway with the opportunity to actively reflect on their learning and understand as well as take part in the creation of knowledge (Dehler and Welsh 2014: 879-880). Besides celebrating the Bicentenary of the Norwegian Constitution and discuss new research on the wider international implications of the 1814 Constitution – with particular focus on Great Britain – the conference endeavoured to presenting the state of current Anglo-Norwegian relations and possible forms of future collaboration. As students of Norwegian language or Scandinavian Studies, students acted as representatives of the future collaborations between Norway and Great Britain and were able to demonstrate their active engagement and invested efforts by presenting individual contributions to the

celebrations and taking an active part in the debates on future research.

As the convenor of Norwegian language teaching at UCL, I had to integrate the bulk of the student engagement activities linked to the Bicentenary conference into language classes. Given that for the majority of Scandinavian Studies students, language courses are part of a language and culture degree, it is often the case that content-based themes are introduced in language classes. Courses remain 'language driven', meaning that the focus is on language instruction even though this is thematically based and draws, where possible, on other subjects the students may be taking as part of their degrees (Cenoz 2015: 11-12). As students were used to this type of content and language integrated learning (CLIL), it was not difficult to introduce the preparation work for the conference into the language classes. What was more challenging was to find ways in which each language group could produce a meaningful contribution that took into account the different language proficiencies reached by the students, namely basic, intermediate and advanced. The task was made somewhat easier by the wealth of online materials and resources gathered on the website www.minstemme.no. Putting together teaching materials and resources on the Norwegian Constitution as well as on other related topics – such as democracy, human rights and national minorities – the website was clearly one of the means through which the committee responsible for the jubilee activities tried to fulfil one of its three main objectives, namely to encourage participation and involvement in the broadest possible way, targeting in particular children and young people (Storthinget 2014: 2, 4-5). Although they often needed to be adapted for Norwegian language learners, many of the teaching initiatives and materials on minstemme.no and on the dedicated jubilee webpage managed by the Norwegian Parliament provided the necessary inspiration. The results were the following:

1. Basic Norwegian (first-year Norwegian course): for this group, whose language skills are still on descriptive and narrative level, I planned a short and very basic session on Norwegian history in Norwegian language, making sure that the essential aspects of the Norwegian Constitution were covered. After this session, the students and I

prepared a collage with words (in Norwegian) that students associated with the Constitution. Students were then asked to write a short text in Norwegian exploring what the most important thing or value was for them. The activity – which was inspired by one of the competitions organised for Norwegian schools – allowed students to expand their vocabulary on topics that would otherwise not necessarily be covered during the first year (see ‘Barn og unges stemmer’, The Voices of Children and Young People).¹ In addition, it also encouraged them to reflect on topical themes linked to the constitution and hence to make the important step from description to reflection. All contributions were collated on a poster, which was exhibited at the seminar.

2. Intermediate Norwegian (second-year course): These students were able to take part in a more complex session (in Norwegian) on the history of the constitution. After this session, I assisted them in producing a short video each of up to one minute. In this video, students explained (in Norwegian) what the Constitution meant to them and why. Similarly to the first year group, the task aimed at strengthening but also challenging their language proficiency while allowing them to engage in the debate concerning the relevance of the Constitution and its history today. The short videos – inspired by an initiative suggested on the jubilee’s website where a number of examples were also available – combined their ability to integrate their personal interests with the more challenging task of discussing abstract topics (‘Bilder og videoer: Grunnlovsjubileet 1814-2014’, Picture and Videos: The Bicentenary of the Constitution 1814-2014). Individual contributions were edited into a video, which was screened and presented at the seminar.

3. Advanced Norwegian (fourth-year course): These students, whose language skills generally range from upper intermediate to advanced, were asked to prepare essays on the topic ‘Min familie i historien’ (My family in history). In their essays, students presented and analysed instances when they felt that they themselves or their families had been part of or experienced a historical event or process. The task was once again based on the guidelines for a competition open to pupils in Norwegian schools and effectively merged the debate around the

meaning of history with the requirements of advanced homework and class assignments, namely producing argumentative texts on abstract topics, explaining viewpoints and demonstrating the ability to master rhetorical devices and genres (see 'Min familie i historien'). The texts were collated in a booklet, which was made available to delegates during the conference.

In addition to the three language groups, students taking the first-year module 'Histories and Cultures of the Nordic Region' were also involved in the engagement activities organised in connection with the 1814 conference at UCL. Students taking this module are generally first-year Scandinavian Studies students and, for this reason, the course covers central aspects of Nordic history and culture. The course is, however, also open to affiliate students and other UCL students with an interest in the area. The involvement of this group was particularly important given that the events of 1814 are an integral part of the syllabus of this module. While the class on the Norwegian Constitution would normally have focused on the historical events and process of 1814, the class I prepared for the group who was going to take part in the conference dealt also with the celebrations of 1814 in 1914 as well as in 2014 and was accompanied by theoretical reflections on the concept of 'collective memory'. In preparation for the class, I asked all the students to bring a picture of a historical or fictional character or of an object that they thought was suitable to commemorate the Bicentenary of the Norwegian Constitution and to prepare a caption where they clearly supported their choice. At the end of the class, students used these pictures and their captions to create a commemorative poster, which was presented at the seminar.

All contributions, in the form of posters, videos and a booklet, were readily available for conference delegates to see, but, in addition to these, all students were given the opportunity to present themselves and their own work at the conference in front of Norwegian and UK researchers, representatives from the Royal Norwegian Embassy in London, the Research Council of Norway and non-specialists.

Following the event, a number of students left enthusiastic messages (some in Norwegian language) in the guestbook about how much they

had enjoyed the activities and the event and had found the project interesting and useful. Similarly invited academics from Norway expressed their interest in meeting the students and finding out how their refreshing perspectives can inform academic research. As Jon Holm, Division Director from the Research Council of Norway wrote in his comments to the event: 'With all our different backgrounds and knowledge we get a better understanding of where to go in the future'.

The benefits of involving the students in the UK celebrations of the Norwegian Constitution were multifaceted. The students took greater care in the quality of the work they produced as they knew it would be displayed and seen by Norwegian representatives. At the same time, they clearly felt involved in what was a public as well as an academic event. The preparation for their individual contributions and class discussion on the history of the Constitution gave them the essential knowledge required to take part in the final roundtable discussion on the relevance of 1814 today. Moreover, the participation in the full programme of the conference gave them a taste of the skills required for public presentations alongside a deeper understanding of the important role that the dialogue between academics, institutions and non-academic audiences plays in the research process. Just as important as the written and oral contributions prepared by the students for the conference was their participation in the social part of the event. During the coffee break some students were interviewed by the Norwegian radio about why they had decided to dedicate their studies to Norwegian language and culture. All students were also invited to the formal dinner – sponsored by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in London – which took place after the seminar. This allowed them to enjoy the end of a long project but also to learn and experience the importance that social mingling has for the creation of professional contacts and networks during research events.

Collaboration between students and staff does indeed – as Angela Brew has argued – foster skills and attitudes that are important in the life and work of our contemporary societies (2006). If the benefits associated with this approach to learning and teaching – which include 'enhanced identification with departmental research culture' and increased understanding of how research is carried out and of how

research can become a career – are important for the higher education sector in general, they are essential for the study of smaller languages and subjects such as Norwegian language and culture are in the UK (Levy and Petrulis 2012: 88). One event or initiative in connection with a jubilee is not sufficient, however, and, as I hope this article has shown, there is a lot to be gained by enhancing student engagement and participation – and bearing this in mind when developing future curricula.

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