PROBLEM BASED TEACHING WITH OTHER FOCUSES THAN PROBLEM SOLVING

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Abstract

Problem based teaching has been on the agenda in higher education for at least the last twenty years and is embedded in professional educations often to prepare students for real life problem solving. However, in when higher education rather aim to provide deeper theoretical and reflective competences promoting the students capacities to address unpredictable challenges in different contexts, there might be other ways of applying and using problem based educational tools. In this paper we describe and discuss our experiences of such attempts in three different higher educational programs.

The three educational settings are a Master of European and International relations, teacher-training courses on master level and Master of Political Science. The work on our new curriculums and pedagogical approaches has taken place within a development project and we have shared ideas and experiences throughout the project. The approach has been differently designed into the three programs but the common focus has been that we do not take off in the problem, but the students have to find the problem and explain how it fits to the theories they learn. We conclude, so far, that a key for success is to present and introduce the students to the model of teaching to be successful.

Keywords: PBL, political science, Innovation, technology, research projects.

1 INTRODUCTION

Problem based teaching has been on the agenda in higher education for at least the last twenty years. Today it is commonly used, sometimes as a frame for full educational programs or in single courses. In particular, it is common in educational programs aiming towards employability in specific professions as in the medical practices for example for nurse and physiotherapists [1, 2]. A main aim of the problem-based learning and teaching methods are to prepare students for specific professional situations. A key capacity in their prospected professional competences is the application and use of tools and models for problem solving.

However, in higher education with broader and more general academic aims such professional situations and competences are less obvious for the students and rarely communicated and conceptualized by the teachers. The teaching aim is rather based on theoretical grounds striving to promote competences to reflect upon and analyse processes rather than finding a given solution in academic disciplines as philosophy, international relations and political science. Here higher academic educations basically address another focus than developing professional competences. It rather builds on a theory of science closer to episteme than phronesis [3, 4]. In such teaching situations the focus is rather on theories, analysis and making a distance than on applicable solutions as in problem-based teaching. Thus we here had an ambition to use teaching methods developed for one type of knowledge aiming to enhance the students capacities and knowledge in an other form of knowledge.
Even if our primary teaching objectives had a theoretical focus we had an ambition to use the positive experiences from problem-based educations, that is commonly used at our university in other program in particular at the medical faculty [http://www.hu.liu.se/om-oss/pedagogisk-verksamhet/pblresurser].

In this paper we will discuss our experiences from three master level courses were we for the first time have developed and tested a model of teaching theories by linking to problems, but without the focus on problem-solving. This paper will present pedagogical development project in three theoretical masters program at a Swedish university. The aim of the project as such has been to deepen the understanding of theories by encouraging students to apply and use theories on real problems. This is still a challenge that we are struggling with and this paper is only telling the results form the first year of the work. The didactical approach has been designed differently into the three programs but the common focus has been that we do not take off in the problem, but the students have to find the problem and explain how it fits to the theories they learn. In this paper the design, implementation and in particular our evaluations of the courses included in the project will be discusses. The general conclusions will contribute to the more general knowledge on collaborative and problem-based learning.

1.1 Aim of the paper

This paper will present pedagogical development project in three social scientific theoretical masters program at a Swedish university. The aim of the project has been to deepen the understanding of theories by encouraging students to apply and use theories on real problems. The approach has been differently designed into the three programs but the common focus has been that we do not take off in the problem, but the students have to find the problem and explain how it fits to the theories they learn.

The paper proceeds in three steps. First we give a brief overview of the research field of problem-based higher education, in particular in political science. The second part of the paper is the main part, where we present the work we have conducted by implementing these approaches into the three master level program at our department. Finally, we discuss our experiences and open for some more general conclusions.

1.2 Developing our teaching and reflecting upon it – A brief not on what ca be called methods and research approach

This paper is based on teaching development project at Linköping University, Sweden. All three authors of this paper have been involved in and managed the project. Thus this presentation and analysis is closely connected to our personal experiences reflections, and we do explicitly point at and discuss what we consider what we want to develop and highlight in our further work.

The project was designed as a response to the opportunity given at our university to apply for funding to develop new teaching approaches aiming to involve students more and use ICT more actively. By this funding we were given time and resources to put an extra effort into the design of the courses and the integration of knowledge production. Through the courses we also had resources to spend a little more time than normally for these courses in order to reflect upon and develop the courses.

Thus we have indeed been deeply involved in the work presented here and as it is presented here it is a description of our work, ambitions and aim. In addition we have made more reflective evaluations among the students participating in the courses than we normally do. These reflective seminars in each of the course are here used as general presentations of the students’ impressions and reflections of the new approaches in the courses. In addition we as the three main teachers in each of the course have had meetings to discuss pedagogical issues and challenges and as the courses proceeded we have also discussed and reflected upon the experiences gained from the, for us, new ways of teaching. The analysis and concluding remarks here are made in reference to some key reading in our field and our long personal experiences as teachers in higher education.

This paper has to bee seen as the first summary of the project and thus the results as well as the reflections made here may be seen as quite basic and shallow. But since we will do all courses once more during the following academic year it is important to summaries and discusses the experiences so far.
2 PROBLEM BASED TEACHING AND CASE METHODS IN HIGHER EDUCATION – BRIEF REVIEW OF A COMPLEX FIELD

All the three courses included in this project are based in political science in broad terms. Political science is a social science discipline. The key focus is the institutional arrangements and systems of government, in different states and on different levels. It focuses on the analysis of political activity and political behaviour as forms of participation and input into the political system. The discipline most often also includes the analyses of how public administration and public services are arranged and designed to meet the decisions made on the political considerations. The discipline is most often divided into sub-disciplines like political theory, international politics or international relations, comparative politics, public administration and the methods to study political processes and structures.

A key challenge in the field of political science is to teach the subjects with out being too political. When adding cases and real political issues such challenges are even more difficult to manage. A common tool to address these challenges has been to let students debate and take on different political positions, not necessarily the ones they prefer. However, also such an approach as debates in the higher education classroom has shown to demand excessive efforts by the teachers. A study evaluating this method concluded that the teach through debates required teachers to rethink existing syllabi, raise coordination issues with and among students and introduce a higher level of uncertainty of outcome in individual class sessions [5].

There are just a few examples of the use of problem-based learning in Political science in the academic literature, but there can of course be much more in practice. The main approach of Problem Based Learning (PBL) is to present students with contextualized problems and introducing the learning objectives based in the problem. The teacher or instructors take on the role of facilitator rather than expert. One of the few examples of analysing the effect of an uncommon examples of teaching political science through PBL, is based on Introductory American Politics Classes at a collage in US [6]. Williamson and Gregory [6] conclude that PBL should be considered as a viable pedagogical tool in political science. However, they also discuss a wide range of issues that they had to consider when implementing PBL in their own teaching. It became obvious that a key task was to design and present the problem to make it interesting and accessible for students. They also had to overcome reluctance among the instructors and students. The students also had to improve their competences to evaluate and compare different sources of information. The teachers had to address and manage how the content of the PBL course would cover the same curriculum as a traditional survey course model. Also the forms of assessment had to be re-defined. In spite of these challenges the authors argue that the benefits of such a teach approach was superior and made the students more engaged and they learned more, but maybe not as broadly as in the traditional survey model of the same course.

Another interesting result was found in a study based on PBL in welfare policy coerces at an American university. Here the authors conclude that the main effect by a PBL approach in the design was that students with fewer pre-existing academic resources performed better and gained more from the teaching [7]. A related teaching method is based on real simulations. In a study of the use of a simulation in an urban politics class it showed that the approach improved student achievement and understanding of theoretical concepts across a range of measures [8].

To conclude this brief overview, we can see that the tests made with PBL in political sciences classes so far are promising but combined with several obstacles. The examples in the literature also address under-graduates, which is not the case here.

3 THREE CASES OF NEW CASE-BASED TEACHING

The project that frames the three attempts of PBL approaches in political sciences here addressed in particular the objective to make students improve their deep learning of theories and concepts by relating them to cases. Thus our overall method was not to provide them with a case or a problem as such but rather to present the conceptual issue and encourage them to find illustrations through cases that they could select more or less unreservedly.

The three course included in the project are all on the master-level in social sciences. The first is on the third semester of the two-year master program of International and European relations (MIER). The second is Advanced Social science in the Teacher education, given on the fifth and final year of the teacher-training program. Finally, there is the course Leadership and management in public administration and services on the third semester of the two-year master program in Political science.
All courses are given by the department of political science at Linköping university, Sweden, and they will be presented in this section.

### 3.1 International and European Relations: A Problem Based Case Approach

The Master of International and European relations (MIER) is a two year programme, recruiting students from all over the world. The first and second semesters are devoted to obligatory courses, focusing in the first semester on international relations and in the second on European relations. In the third semester students have the options of continuing taking advanced courses, now with a focus on international governance, conduct a guided internship, or taking compatible courses at one of the faculty’s or the programme’s partner institutions. The fourth semester is entirely devoted to writing the master’s thesis. For the purposes of the present project, two courses of the third semester were targeted for developing a problem based case approach to teaching: Diplomacy and Foreign Policy Analysis, and International Organization: Theory and Practice, each course accounting for 7.5 ECTS credits.

MIER faces an apparent dilemma of providing academic training which corresponds both to high academic standards, supplying the theoretical and methodological basis for PhD studies and research careers, and offering appropriate skills and understanding of professional life in complex political organizations. This is to be accomplished in a multicultural student group with widely different backgrounds in terms of academic tradition. The students also tend to have varying inclinations and goals for their studies. One way of responding to the different needs and orientations of the students has been to introduce the guided internship option for those who have a strong motivation to enhance their practical competence. Another strategy is to infuse theoretically oriented courses with teaching methods and student activities that are conducive to developing professional skills. Of course, there is ideally a reciprocal exchange between theory and practice to the extent that a focus on in wide sense professional skills may enhance theoretical knowledge. This is where the present project becomes relevant.

In planning and implementing a problem based case approach for the MIER courses, a main consideration has been that this need not be the sole or leading pedagogical model for the programme as a whole or even for individual courses. Thus the guiding idea has been to design modules within the courses, which allow students to focus on specific cases and to assume a larger responsibility for their own learning processes. Of course, this points towards possible problems of defining assignments with a view to the overall learning objectives of the courses (and ultimately the programme as such), and allowing wide discretion to the students in visualizing objectives and organizing the substance of their work.

The modules are organized as fairly basic PBL-processes, in this case consisting of eight stages:

1. **Clarifying uncertain terms and concepts.**
   What are the terms and concepts? Make use of acquired knowledge!

2. **Defining the problem.**
   What problem is *indicated* by the assignment?

3. **Brainstorm**
   Analyze the problem – generate ideas and hypotheses!

4. **Summarizing and ordering**

5. **Formulating learning objectives**
   Questions to be answered (what do we need to learn in order to address the problem?)

6. **Individual study**
   Writing an individual report.

7. **Reporting back and discussion**

8. **Reflection/feedback**

The stages 1-5 were dealt with during an introductory two-hour seminar in half groups, with a student chairperson and a “secretary” taking the lead and organizing the discussion. Two or three days were allocated for individual studies, leading up to a written report that was presented and discussed at a final seminar in full class. The variable element is the case as such, which can be more or less oriented towards actual problem solving (coming up with a “solution”), and interpretation and in-depth understanding of concepts or empirical phenomena. The latter aspect was emphasized in the course on diplomacy where students were called upon to reflect on the meaning and significance of
diplomatic culture. The course on international organizations presented them, however indirectly, with the “practical” task of reforming the UN Security Council.

Both tasks turned out to be challenging, but inspiring. It was immediately apparent that the approach had a stimulating effect on some students who ordinarily tend to be relatively passive in lectures and seminars. Still, different backgrounds in academic culture were telling. While some students eagerly embraced the opportunity to take an extended responsibility for the learning process, others were more hesitant when faced with a clear requirement for individual initiative and flexibility.

Relative inexperience among students and teacher alike of problem based and case oriented learning posed some significant questions. From the teacher’s point of view the format raises issues about “command and control”, how and to what extent the intended objective of the assignment is made negotiable when handed over to the students. From the students point of view the limited experience of problem-based learning may cause difficulties in finding an appropriate level of abstraction. This is essentially a matter of keeping two things simultaneously in mind: the need to distil a relatively open-ended assignment into practical objectives and a research strategy, while keeping in touch with the theoretical framework and scope conditions of the course as a whole. Students were clearly unaccustomed to think and work on these terms, which probably accounts for notable variations in quality of the individual papers. The outcome of the whole exercise probably depends significantly on the willingness and ability of the participants to keeping the stages apart and work through the process according to plan. Success in this respect depends both on students understanding and acknowledging the goals and principles of the approach, and the perceptiveness and good judgment on part of the facilitator. The main conclusion is, however, that the apparent challenges of interpreting the task and transforming it into a meaningful and doable learning process actually are opportunities to develop a wide range of abilities. There is an obvious link between the problem based case approach and the development of research skills. Thus the problem based case approach encourages students to retrieve and make use of already acquired knowledge and offers the prospect of integrating conceptual knowledge in relation to a specific subject matter. Leadership experience is another evident aspect of having to organize the work process within a group, without direct guidance from the course teacher.

In an advanced level setting, where variation of learning methods are at a premium, and a main focus is on developing the independence and initiative of the students, as well as their capability to put conceptual and theoretical knowledge to work, the problem based case approach has much to offer. The main asset of the model is to let students focus on a topic and turning it into a problem that can be accessed by means of concepts, frameworks and methods that have been introduced at earlier stages of the programme, or indeed forms part of the students’ earlier academic backgrounds and life experiences. As a work in progress much remains to be done, however.

### 3.2 Social science in the Teacher education – Learning to use Cases to teach on cases

In the teachers training program there were a particular focus on the students’ abilities to develop competences in line with phronesis [4]. This aims in this context to improve both their didactical and content knowledge, and to make it useful in their coming professional practice as a teacher and thereby to increase their employability. These ambitions can be framed as a double challenge when working with case-based methods in the social science in the teacher-training program. On the one hand the professional practice of the teacher is a case, and on the other hand there are cases to be used within this practice.

Even in the teacher training programs the most frequent teaching methods in political science are lectures and seminars, where the first one is one-way communication and the latter mainly deliberation in groups of top-down decided tasks (i.e. course literature). However, through this project we got the opportunity to work in new ways with 14 students majoring in Social Science at graduated level. The case method was introduced to work with authentic, real-life problems, in a real life context of upper primary schools. The student had no, or some of them just limited, previous experience of such methodology. The course aim and content was to promote their competences and understanding about present conditions in the society related to welfare, segregation and poverty. In addition they had to develop competences to evaluate formative and summative assessment including acquire knowledge to communicate results of pupils performances in school.

The project started by explanation and deliberation of theory behind case methods and problem based learning [9]. The students created their own learning aims for the course and they had together with
the instructor interactive exercises to explore the course content. The actual case for the students was to teach by case methodology in a Swedish upper primary school. A further aspect was to integrate mobile technology with pedagogy. Thus, every student was equipped with a tablet in order to use in teaching as well as possibility to use the schools facilities of technology. The upper primary schools are well-equipped with tablets, lap tops, smart boards etc. and the students and teachers in the schools are often more familiar with the technology than the students for the teacher training program.

The students were doing an internship period for six weeks, when these tasks were supposed to be conducted in the classrooms of pupils age 9-12. The assignment for the student was to teach together with peers (4-5 students). They had to set up a case based activity for the pupils on either “democracy”, “politics and governance of Sweden”, or “poverty”. The focus and content was selected in collaboration with the teachers at the upper primary school. The design of the case activity had to be according to the Swedish curriculum. The teacher training students designed and presented realistically problems, where authentic situations that require solutions processed in groups, through discussion, and through the pupil’s own reflection, with the aim of developing the individual learner’s analytical skills and insights of a content.

As mentioned before the university students were supposed to use tablets and related technology in their teaching. The groups vary a lot in their usage of mobile technology. Ranged from limited use (showing Youtube clips) to usage of blog, social media etc. well integrated in their teaching. The overall project was compiled by each student group by a written report and oral presentation and discussion on the report.

In their oral and written evaluations the teacher training students’ expressed mainly positive experiences. They had appreciated the opportunity to develop understanding of a new teaching method and to work with a case in a real classroom. They found it interesting to plan, execute teaching and evaluate learning. The latter includes assessment and to practice the ability on authentic pupils test and results, which was highly appreciated. The students also found it valuable to get an opportunity of extra teaching practice (they have 20 weeks of teaching practice in their program). Hence, more teaching practice is always appreciated by the students. Thus, the students experienced positive meeting with the school and pupils. One of the most common statement from the students was concerning the meeting and relations to the pupils. Other positive experience was the seminars, which are central in the case method. Then learning trajectories were established and the university students acquired concrete evidence of the pupils learning.

A key challenge for the students was to integrate case method in their teaching. The pupils in the upper primary school had no previous experiences of such method. Rather, the teaching is traditional; top-down teaching by text-book (questions and answers). In the evaluation form one of the student group states “Our biggest difficulty has been that pupils have no experience of alternative forms of methods.” Thus, it was a dilemma for the students to enter the school with another teaching approach and try to quickly gain understanding among pupils for the method. One of the groups expressed their problem in their written report “To teach them to think freely and to anchor their thinking to theory, when they are accustomed to search for facts and the right answer.”

The students also expressed that they had limited skills of case method to teach in an appropriate and competent way. However, that is a common comment of any pedagogical method with the exception of lecturing and mostly based on lack of teaching experience. Further, the students experience practical complications such as changed time-tables, lack of communication with ordinary teachers at the school, technical problems (i.e. lack of Internet connection to the tablet or projector connection to tablet) and lack of time (i.e. most lessons are 40 minutes). Moreover, the integration of technology was difficult. Obviously there was the students’ lack of skills to use technology in an appropriate way in classrooms. Definitely the students has skills of technology usage such as social media, update of information etc., but limited skills of creating blog, film, download of applications etc. for educational purpose. Perhaps the students are overrated in their knowledge of technology, and are not as skilful as expected to be especially in their occupational profession.

3.3 Leadership and organisation – Cases in Master of Politics

The Master of Political Science is a two-year programme, recruiting students from different BA programs, but mainly in Political Science. The first and third semesters are devoted to half obligatory courses and half optional courses that are open for students both on the first and third semester. The second semester is open for internships, international exchange courses or just any other courses at
the university. The fourth and last semester is devoted to their master thesis. This course is the last compulsory course within the program and it accounts for 7.5 ECTS credits.

The course in Leadership and management focuses on specific challenges for leadership and management in public organisations. It differs is two fundamental ways from leadership and management in general since it is based on policy decision and legislation and that the funding of the businesses is not directly related the users (customers) but based on taxes distributed through complex interplays of policy decisions. Thus it is critical that the students can reflect upon and relate to these settings, since it in most cases will be the context they will work in. We also point at the importance of these competences to improve employability.

The common take off for the course is theories on organizations and leadership in public settings as it is famed in the Norwegian (focusing of the Scandinavian welfare states) text book: Organization theory and the public sector: instrument, culture and myth [10]. Based on this approach and additional articles and papers the students were asked to select four types of cases to work with four one week each. Each of these four week were structured in line with the PBL model as presented above. Each Monday we had an introduction lecture focusing on concepts and presentation of the type of case they had to identify and analyze this week. On Wednesdays there were optional workshops for supervision on questions and design issues that had emerged through the first days. On Fridays they had to bring a pre-seminar version of their paper to discuss in cross-case groups in seminars. This paper had to be submitted in a final version before next Monday session, when a new type of case was introduced. Hereby the work became intensive, and the students that were used to have all examination by the end of the course complained on the work-load.

The cases were not prepared by the teachers and instructors instead the type of cases asked for or the context to search for cases were defined in this course. There were four types of cases the students had to work with.

The first week they had to select short video clip from TV-news highlighting an issues of public sector management and to discuss how it could be analyzed through the framing of the literature. The most successful illustrations were in this assignment selected from the regional TV-channels and addressed issues like mistreatments in elderly care, urban planning and mismanagement of a zoo owned by a municipality. These were presented in the seminar and we watched the short videos together, before discussing the analysis of management strategies.

The second week focused on evaluations and performance management in public services. Here a sample of evaluations was presented on the course web-page, and unfortunately all student groups did chose on of the example evaluations. The discussion and analyzes here focused both on the forms the evaluations were mad in and the content of them. They had theories on evaluations and performance management in public sectors to relate to and use in addition to the main textbook. Issues that came up in these discussions referred to the inter-play of policy, decision-making, implementation and evaluations. Hereby, we covered a broad theoretical scope but limited to a case they came to know.

In the third week the groups were split into pairs of student to make an interview with a senior leader in a public organization. The literature this week focused on the personal leadership and the role of team work. The interviews were guided to focus on the persons’ career and strategic situations and how s/he manages in relation to policy makers and the professionals in the organization. Most students had very positive experiences from this case and referred to the person the met as a role model, for some of them it finally became clear how their own professional career may develop.

The last assignment was to read a biography, to consider the history told of a political leader as an illustration of leadership and management in a public organization. The ambition was to give students impressions from high level executives and to see political processes that they made had read about in history from a more personal point of view and hereby to accommodate the theories and models into a personal setting. However, most of the students spent too much time just reading that they did not have the opportunity to reflect and analyze. The books on historical people as Churchill, Thatcher and Swedish prime ministers were to detailed and historical that the students did not manage to see the patterns of management.

The final week the students had a write a take-home exam with questions focusing of cross-case aspects. Here the interviews and evaluations appeared to most referred to by students. They were both most appreciated as activities and the ones the most easy were related to the literature. The over-all impression of the students was that they were not prepared to work so hard every week of the
course. However, most of them saw the importance of the issues and the approach in relation to their employability. One of the even said in the written evaluation “now I finally know what these four years have thought me, since there is a use for it”.

3.4 Remarks on the teaching experiences

A key lesson learned in all three cases was that it is critical how the approached was introduced for the students and how their own “problem-based” work were supposed to be addressed and managed from learners perspective. It is more important, that in traditional ways of teaching, to take the students perspective and focus on her learning process in the design of the curriculum and the interactive stages of the courses. Students said by the end of the courses that they were not familiar the unclear instructions and aims and objectives of the courses and they asked for clarifications on what was demanded from them.

Based on the first remark it was also obvious that there is a need to give space for the students’ own reflections and to open for deliberative discussion sharing interpretations. Hereby they are given opportunities to integrate what they are learning to their own knowledge strand and connect new experiences into their framing of competences. In the political science course it was obviously too much put into the same short period of time and no, or at least to little, time for personal reflections.

Thirdly, it was obvious that we in all three courses had over-estimated the impact of technology-enhanced learning. Neither we as teacher nor the students had the competences, confidence and maybe not even interest in taking it as far as we planned. The main reason we found for this

The experiences gained during this first three practical test will be further developed during the next academic year. Thus are paying a particular focus on how to develop and use the experiences gained through the first year of using these pedagogical approaches. The lessons learned that we will address in new ways are mainly about the design of the courses and the main objectives addressed by the students and how these expected are presented in course information and other forms of communication.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Even if we had an ambition to focus on theoretical knowledge and development of competences to reflect and analyse, this approach also highlighted the importance for students to manage real cases. The students obviously experienced a lack of real world practical implications of the theories and model they studied. In addition they show the importance of focusing on abstract analyses and reflect upon real issues.

It became obvious for all of us as teacher that we had a specific challenge when focusing both the didactical approach and an advanced content. The form of teaching might hide the content we want to teach. Thus we will spend more time of introducing the didactical approach in the beginning of the courses next time to be able to focus on the content and the curriculum as it proceeds. We also underestimated the students strong pre-understanding of what university education is, the expected lectures and seminars in traditional ways. The international course that kept most of the basics of that, but filled with new content, had least critics regarding the design of the course. Our lesson learned is to put a greater emphasis on the introduction of the courses and the methods the students are supposed to work with.

All the courses included in this project were given on a master level and the students were thus experienced and used to the university setting. This setting has both its pros and cons. In the literature reviewed above it seems that young students might be more open to new ways of learning. As experienced students they are used to take on the reading the to fulfil the tasked asked for. They also had, as it showed to be particular resources in these cases, an experience for addressing theoretical and conceptual discussions and approaches. However, the constraint was that they were (to) familiar with the ordinary teaching approaches. They were not used to these, for them, new forms of education. Thus they needed, as stressed above, a clear and explicit introduction. First they had to get a clear picture of what was expected from them and how we expected them to fulfil this learning exercise. But it became clear, in all the courses, that we have to spend more time to convince the students what not to do and how to get them out of their ordinary studying strategies. It is partly a process of de-learning studying strategies that in other situations had been successful.
In spite of our ambitions to focus on the theoretical competences the students did, in all of the courses, by the end of the courses highlight more practical implications of the competences. Their own, for us quite surprisingly, evaluation of the courses were that they gained competences that had relevance for practical situation through out the courses. This was might a result of which course we had included in the project, that all were late in their educational programs and did not focus primarily on basic theoretical training. Through our case approach we also made it clear what type of situations the might face in their coming professional careers. They were all positive to work an authentic cases and real applications, that showed the usefulness of theoretical analytical capacities and competences. Some students even highlighted that they had not seen these needs to combine different competences in this way before. However, this might indicate the lack of such connections earlier in these educational programs and point at a demand to that more broadly in our undergraduate program as well.

In the program for European and international relations the student group was the most mixed. The group included students that both had different academic disciplines in their undergraduate academic exams and international students with a mixed cultural background. This heterogeneity of the group was both a strength and a constrain for the implementation of our case based pedagogical approach. The different competences and disciplinary training of the students could contribute in different ways but it was more complicated to agree on analyses and theoretical models. In the Swedish master program, however, there were a common confirmation of the mature welfare state as a setting for the public sector leadership and management. This might hide taken for granted aspects embedded in the notion of being part of the system they analyse.

The lesson we as teachers and instructors have learned in this aspect might be to open for a meta-analysis and discussion on a general level on why and how the cases are selected and what they represent. The students in the teacher training program had an ambition to learn a case based methods as much, since the saw it as a method that they will use in the practice as teachers. Thus it became clear that they also demanded a meta-discussion on the teaching with case-based methods. We had not prepared for this at all. This will be one of our key focuses for the next year of the course. Such a meta-analysis of the learning outcomes might also opens to help students express their competences in terms of employability and future opportunities.

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