Inquiry-based Learning Design Overview

Athens and Empire

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1. The students and the curriculum

Level: 3 (1 MA student registered)

Module: AAP377: Athens, Empire and the Classical Greek World

Numbers: 8 students, including 1 MA student (2006-07); 22 students (2007-08)

2. The teaching and learning aims

This unit aims to:

- acquaint students with the major issues in the archaeology of classical Athens and its relationship to the larger ancient Greek world;

- introduce students to the range of methods and theoretical approaches applied in Greek archaeology and enable them to understand changing perspectives within the subject;

- ensure that students understand the place of Athens within the diversity and complexity of the Greek world within a broad chronological and geographical framework;

- introduce students to debates and issues such as empire, identity construction, ideology and the appropriation of the past, as well as key themes in Greek archaeology through case studies;

- relate course material to larger issues of historical archaeology.

By the end of the unit, a candidate will be able to demonstrate:

- an in depth knowledge of the methodological and theoretical approaches to Greek archaeology, and the relation of this area of study to the broader discipline of historical archaeology;

- a detailed knowledge of the complexity of Athenian culture and its expression in Attica, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea;

- an ability to assess primary data of different types (artefactual, documentary, epigraphic, environmental), based on an understanding of formation processes and cultural practices as well as the limitations of archaeological evidence;

- a detailed knowledge and understanding of the archaeology of the sites and monuments of Athens and the classical Greek world, as exemplified in a wide range of case studies;

- an ability to analyse and reflect critically upon a range of interpretations of archaeological and historical evidence and how the Greek past impacts on the present.

3. The inquiry/ inquiries

There were two major IBL sessions.

1. **Whose democracy?** In this session, held in week 3, students worked together to answer the question 'What would the University look like as a democracy?' This was intended to get the students thinking more deeply about the concept of democracy and to engage them with the topic. They produced a flip-chart poster and reported back to the bigger group. This was then followed by a group-led discussion of class readings, which had been posted on the discussion board part of the virtual learning environment prior to class. The main ideas were written on post-its and posted onto the whiteboard. The groups then discussed these ideas and decided upon the connections between them.

2. **Athens, past and present.** In this workshop, held in week 10, groups of two or three students gave group presentations using internet-based resources. Topics included *Athens and the 'Grand Tour'*, *Athens and European nation-building*, and *Athens 2004*.

In addition to the major IBL session, small inquiry tasks were included in a number of other teaching sessions. These included:

o   Source criticism (evaluating different sources for the topic at hand)

o   Whole group concept mapping

o   Comparing and contrasting arguments about the topic at hand (in pairs, read two short extracts and discuss)

o   Brainstorming modern comparisons and/or modern reflections of the topic at hand, discussion of why and how these might be important

4. The assessment

Mid-term assignment 40% (one 500 word outline [15%], coursework presentation [25%]); end-of-term assignment 60% (discussion board contributions [15%], 1500 word essay [30%], 500 word reflection document [15%])

5. The 'process support'

Information literacy competencies were developed through collaborative student research and presentation on primary source material, as outlined in the 'inquiry' section above. The virtual learning environment was also utilised to support the learning process, for example in requiring students to post material in preparation for teaching sessions and in requiring students to contribute to a discussion board.

6. The information resources and strategies

A limited number of specialist electronic resources were identified and the IBL sessions focused largely upon them. In addition, a far larger number of such resources were added to the virtual learning environment for this course.

As this is a level 3 module the IL component focused on higher order information literacy capabilities such as comparing and evaluating information. The reflection and annotated bibliography tasks, for example, helped build such competencies in students.

7. The tutoring/facilitation approach

The module as a whole makes use of a range of lectures, seminars and tutorials. IBL elements were introduced in order to add variety to and increase engagement with what can seem like a detailed mass of information. Throughout the semester there was a range of large and small IBL sessions in all of these types of classes. In addition, it was necessary to facilitate the online discussions in the virtual learning environment.

8. The learning technology

The virtual learning environment was invaluable as an information resource and an administrative tool. It was only in the second iteration (2007/8) that it was used to facilitate periodic online discussion boards. These were successful in stimulating discussion in the more traditional lecture-based sessions of the module.

9. The learning spaces

Use was made of the CILASS Collaboratory in Bartolomé House for the IBL parts the module. The flexibility of this space for group work and discussion, and the use of laptops and plasma screens added considerably to the success of the IBL sessions. The informal nature of the space enabled discussion, and the resources of the room facilitated the sharing/discussion portions of the sessions.

10. What really worked

In AAP377, the IBL sessions and assessments fostered high levels of student engagement and interest. Consequently, class discussion was often lively and the students produced some very high quality work; for example, a presentation assessment analysing sources of primary data resulted in some of the best undergraduate research the project leader has ever seen and as a result 50% of the students received first class marks in 2006-7.

Even more rewarding was the sense of pride and ownership the students had for their individual projects; student feedback on the presentation assignment was overwhelmingly in favour of extending the presentation time limit and having more chance for questions.

Student feedback from 2006-7 was overwhelmingly positive: almost all of students on this module (7 in total) ranked it 'very good' (with only one evaluation in the 'good' category) and 'very interesting' (with only one evaluation in the 'interesting' category), and that all the students considered that the delivery of the classes was clear and helpful. The two additional comments written on the evaluation forms both comment positively on the IBL components of the module. The first said that the discussions in lectures were 'useful and interesting'. The second comment praised the midterm presentation for removing some of focus of level 3 assessment from the traditional essay-based assessment.

The problem-based delivery of key components of the module's content enhanced student engagement with the material, provided them with significant opportunities to work on discussion, debate, presentation and group-work skills; allowed the project leader to focus some of the assessments on the critical analysis of sources; and perhaps most importantly, created opportunities for the students to think independently and to develop arguments.

11. Things to build on and/or do differently next time around

If I were to identify weaknesses in the incorporation and development of this module, it would be:

a) the first time I ran the module there wasn't enough integration between the IBL components and the rest of the module. I was able to address this problem in the second iteration by incorporating more discussions and debates into each session and by changing the assessment format;

b) the amount of administration involved in running the module. Beyond the expected time and effort involved in developing the module and the IBL tasks, it takes a considerable amount of time to organise, administer and mark (and keep track of marks) all the various components of the module. This was particularly evident in the second year when module numbers grew from 7 to 22 students.

12. Advice to others doing a similar project

13. Further comments

An increased flexibility in departmental assessment strategy has been very important. I have been able to move away entirely from the midterm essay/end of term essay model of assessment to include a presentation, discussion boards, reflection document and mini-essay.