

Pedagogic Progress in Upper Level (41-80 credits) University Education

Abstract

Goal

The purpose of this project is to increase the quality, the effectiveness and the usefulness of upper level education (påbyggnadsutbildningen). The planning of the project has taken place after a thorough examination and analysis of the problems that this form of education is experiencing in its present shape. These problems can be attributed to three different stumbling blocks:

1. The gap between the lower and the upper level courses concerning their divers demands for knowledge and skills, their working methods and goals.
2. The difficulty in accomplishing the studies in the amount of time available.
3. The limited usefulness of the education in future professional activity. The project will attend to these problems using new angles of approach, organizationally as well as pedagogically.

Methods

At present the upper level education is characterized by extremely individualized study processes. Add to that the division into separate study courses and essay courses, which have a disruptive effect on the studies. Furthermore, this education is traditionally oriented towards being a preparation for postgraduate studies, and this to an extent that in no way corresponds to the small fraction of upper level students who intend to go further with studies in the field. Against a background of such critical and self-critical observations, our project can be described as having the following main elements

1. to stimulate the students to join each other in goal-oriented project and supervision groups, distributed among a number of teachers with different specialities
2. to replace the division between study courses and essay courses with integrated studies.

3. to diversify types of investigation and forms of accounting in order to enable and generate alternative genres of examination besides the traditional "scholarly" essay.

4. to continuously stimulate the correlation between the lower and upper level studies with impulses in both directions.

Final report

When we started our project "Pedagogic Progress in Upper Level (41-80 credits) University Education"

we aimed at finding ways to increase the quality, the effectiveness and the usefulness of upper level education. At the time the upper level education was characterized by extremely individualized study processes. The division into separate study courses and essay courses had a disruptive effect on the studies. Very few students finished their studies within the given timeframe.

Furthermore, this education was traditionally oriented towards being a preparation for postgraduate studies, and this to an extent, that in no way corresponds to the small fraction of upper level students who intended to go further with studies in the field. The consequences were that the majority of the students in the upper level courses lacked the stimulation and the motivation, which characterize studies aimed at broader areas of activities.

Participating departments of the project were the Department of Comparative Literature in Stockholm and Lund. Participating members were Kerstin Dahlbäck and Magnus Röhl from Stockholm and Lars Gustaf Andersson, Birger Hedén, Claes-Göran Holmberg, Per Erik Ljung, Anders Palm, Mona Sandqvist and Jan Thavenius from Lund.

To fulfill our goal we set up a number of sub-projects:

1. "Supplementary Course Development" (Stockholm)
2. "Literary Aesthetics" (Lund)
3. "Media and Culture Studies in Progress" (Lund)
4. "Danish Children's Literature" (Lund)
5. "Follow-up of a New Course at the Basic Level" (Lund)

The aim of the Stockholm project was to change the lower level (1-40 credits) in a way that would benefit the upper level studies. The Lundian projects were experiments within the upper level education.

The Stockholm project tried to deal with the fact that the Department of Comparative Literature had no continuous 1-40 credit level education. There was a 1-20 credit level course followed by an intermediate course at the 21-40 credit level. In their experiment they reanimated the 1-40 credit level block in a new way. The leading idea was to try a design where you carefully and slowly penetrated a smaller number of preferably complete works of fiction and poetry.

At the same time, systematic attention (especially concerning questions of method) was given to manuals and studies in specialized subjects. They also wanted historical and other elements to be integrated in a productive way in the study of the works of art.

In connection with that, training in writing was given an especially important position; the ability to understand what a given subject demands and to find the words to bring about the most effective intermediation of knowledge and insight must be practised.

The projects from Lund tried in different ways to coordinate the curriculum of the courses given with the essay writing of the students, the expressed practical and preparatory-for-the-world-of-work aims was accomplished in a concrete way within the framework of the upper level study program. For the students, the courses would generate subjects for their essays as well as provide support for the essay writing while they were attending the course; for the teachers the responsibility for the courses (5 credits) were combined with the supervising responsibility for the essay (10 credits). In subproject number 3 Jan Thavenius and Lars Gustaf Andersson were able to experiment with a basic course "Culture and Media" and its continuation at the upper level studies. They introduced a number of new methods to strengthen the cohesion of the studies and to give the students a number of tools to work with. In subproject number 5 Mona Sandqvist tried with the help of Internet to strengthen the bonds between students and students and students and teachers.

The progress of the project was continuously documented through logbooks written by the participating teachers. At the end of the project period we arranged a nationwide conference for the Departments of Comparative Literature where we presented our findings. Several of the departments has since then changed their upper level studies in the direction suggested by the project.

With the help of the grant from The Council for the Renewal of the Higher Education we were able to experiment with the upper level education in various ways. Our goals were

1. to stimulate the students to join each other in goal-oriented project and supervision groups, distributed among a number of teachers with different specialities
2. to replace the division between study courses and essay courses with integrated studies where the students work with different working methods (the reading of texts, discussions, oral and written accounts) in a clearly defined area of interest
3. to diversify types of investigation and forms of accounting in order to enable and generate alternative genres of examination besides the traditional "scholarly" essay, all with a view to directing the studies as much as possible towards future professional activity and the specific demands on production and mediation of

knowledge connected with that

4. to continuously stimulate the correlation between the lower and upper level studies with impulses in both directions: partly by - at the upper level - taking advantage of and passing on didactic methods proven successful at the basic level (process writing etc), partly by introducing features that are fundamental to the upper level studies (problem formulation, information retrieval, etc.) at the lower levels.

Of these goals we achieved goal number 1, 2 and 4 but were not able to fulfil goal number 3 more than moderately. Due to strong resistance within the Department and from the students we were not allowed to test the possibility of replacing the traditional essay with some other alternative more suitable to the modern demands of the upper level education. However, we consider our project successful insofar that we managed to raise the number of students who passed the upper level education within the given time from a dismal under 10 % to somewhere between 60-70 %. Through our experimenting we also gave inspiration to other Departments and comparative Literature in the country.

More extensive descriptions of the sub-projects will be published on the home page of the Department of Comparative Literature, Lund University.
<http://www.litt.lu.se/GRU/project.htm>