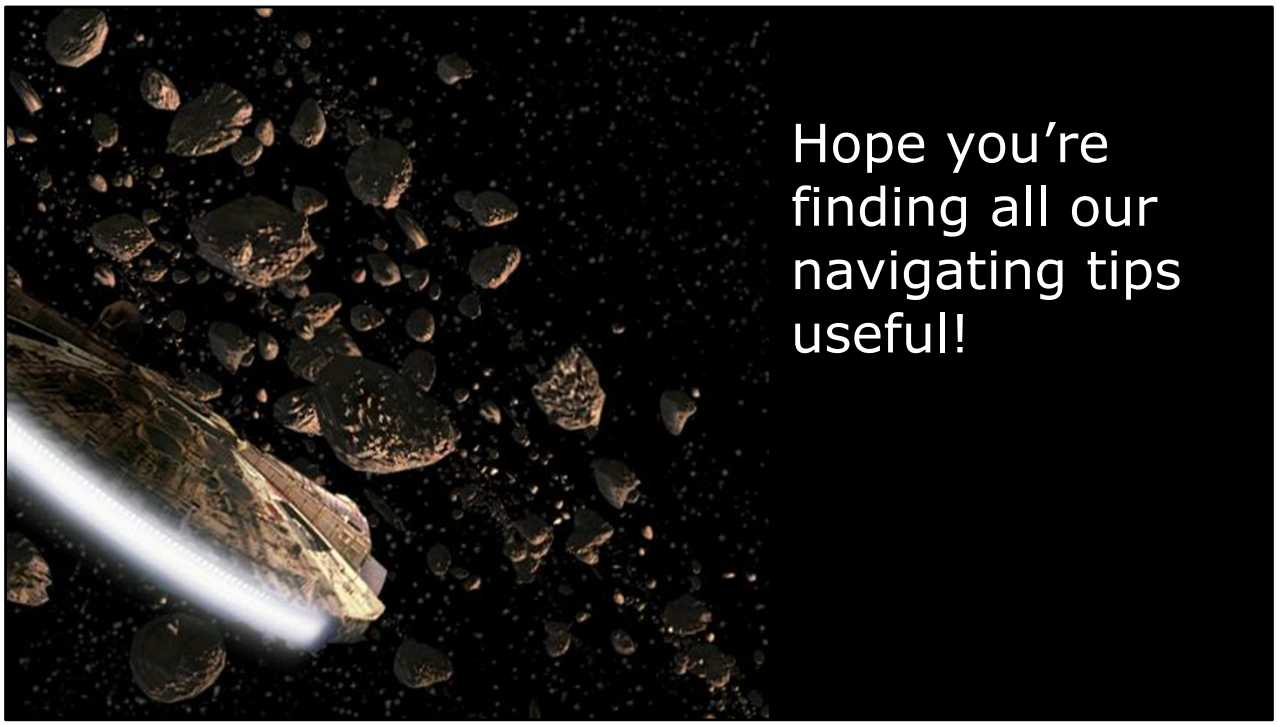
# Thinking about Pedagogy as Medievalists

## I. The teaching problem

- Randy Bass paper more than twenty years ago; research vs. teaching problems
- But teaching problems are opportunities for us
- Currently dealing with massive teaching problem that presents an opportunity to rethink teaching
- Many of us deploy "folk pedagogies" that we tweak by trial and error
- Folk pedagogies worked well enough that they've survived with tweaks
- Those pedagogies tend to focus on what content students remember (more than we like to admit)
- Not what they are able to do



- Johannes Teutonicus painted by Laurentius de Voltolina.
- Lots of our pedagogies originated here.
- Probably all familiar with the image: big point: not all students have books
- Tend to continue to teach as though that were the case
- Medievalists have been challenging the perseverance of medieval pedagogies
- Mary Lynn Rampolla, at Trinity (methods book)
- Burkholder at Fairleigh Dickinson, active in the Teaching Professor
- But the virtual turn radically and visibly alters the teaching field
- An opportunity to rethink what we're doing




- But it has come suddenly and without warning, not giving us time.
- Assaulted with suggestions.
- Daily, perhaps more than daily, messages about teaching and teaching tips
- Offers to engage in webinars—like this one?—to adjust to the challenge of virtual learning environments.
- We’re in the Millennium Falcon negotiating the asteroid field (asteroid fields mostly empty)

I. The teaching problem
II. Why do I need a theory for teaching?

- So not a teaching tip
- Instead a little theory
- We use theory all the time in our research—race, literary theory, network, gender
- Teaching also intellectual work and theory can guide it
- Particularly theories of pedagogy.
- Re: Perkins these theories
    - Organize teaching and learning for best results
    - Consider the activities that foster learning
    - Also consider how to select and organize the materials to support learning
    - Consider pace and sequence for learning
- A little theory can help guide your choices of content, structure, and activities—in short design

I. The teaching problem
II. Why do I need a theory for teaching?
III. Some pedagogical ideas
    A. Backward design

- Most useful for thinking about course as whole—backward design

The backward design question:

What do I want my students to know and be able to do at the end of my course?

- The big question backward design asks
- Can’t be bunch of stuff about MA
- We wouldn’t say that
- But students might come away thinking that was the task
- So emphasis on “able to do” or competencies
- If our subjects were languages, wouldn’t just want them to learn the vocabulary
- Would want them to learn to speak

The backward design question:

What do I want my students to know and be able to do at the end of my course?

The follow-up question:

What student work would show me what my students know (mostly know, know some of, know a little, are clueless about) and are able (mostly able, partially able, a little able, unable) to do?

- Next question, which is about a final assignment
- Exams mostly test what students know or remember
- Timed tests don't really get at what they're able to do
- But in virtual environment, tests of knowledge are difficult to administer—students look things up
- But WE look things up! Our work is legitimate.
- So what could students do that would be "junior version"?—Perkins and Little League
- NILOA (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment)—I know this is eduspeak, but really—what are your students learning and how do you know?
- Alternative: legitimate peripheral participation—i.e. participating in your research, hard to do for medievalists
- Bottom line: letting students know not just what we want them to do but also why

- Welcoming them into our communities of practice
- Example (not prescription): Historical Context
    - Wanted students to know how to create historical context for interpreting medieval narratives
    - Weaving context is difficult
    - Essays didn’t work: too many things going on; spaghetti problem, ritual problem (Bain)
    - Solution: posters in teams—unfamiliar, required selection of evidence
    - Clear what they knew and were able to do

The course design question:

What course activities and assignments will help students develop the competencies and knowledge they need for the final assignment?

## At least halfway

- Next step is answering this question
  - For my students, practice doing posters
  - Learning to make connections between the historical context and the narratives
  - Learning to analyze the narratives, to get beyond the plot
  - Backward design helped me select the course assignments and activities

The course design question:

What course activities and assignments will help students develop the competencies and knowledge they need for the final assignment?

and

The content question:

What course content will help students learn what they need to know to prepare them for the final assignment?

- Once you know where you're going and the road you'll travel, you can think about the course content
- Cooking analogy:
  - You know what the meal as a whole will be
  - You need to decide on the cooking techniques
  - Then there's the shopping list



- We don’t want to wander through the store randomly grabbing things
- There’s always selection in every course; this process just makes it less random
- Backward design can help make that purpose clear to students
- Really crucial in virtual classes that students understand why you’re having them do what they do
- True for all classes, but it’s easier for them to ask or you to tell in F2F classes
- Also when you know where you’re going it is easier to figure out the best way to get there, what virtual methods to use (I’m not the expert here)
- There are some good guides—Flower Darby and James Lang have a good book as does Susan Ko, who with Olenka Zhadko will be up next, so listen to them!

I. The teaching problem
II. Why do I need a theory for teaching?
III. Some pedagogical ideas
    A. Backward design
    B. Bottlenecks/Threshold Concepts

- Backward design complete rethinking
- We're tired, last semester was brutal, we're all stressed about the pandemic, teaching more than one course
- Alternative to complete rethink?
- Two approaches that are less totalizing that focus on stuck places
- As medievalists we often tend to act as though information is the problem
    - Students know little and a lot comes from Sunday School or movies
- But the real stuck places are often epistemic
    - They think their task is to "know" stuff and are mystified that it isn't enough
    - They're mystified with Graff problem problem
    - Aren't they supposed to know the plot of *Erec and Enide*? Aren't facts just facts?

    - They’re not making intellectual moves we make without thinking *or explaining*
- My Einhard problem:
    - students select a date but don’t use it in interpretation
    - They don’t know *why* the date matters; the date is inert knowledge
    - Can’t make an historical argument that way; can’t make a literary argument from just a plotline.
    - So they’re stuck
- So another approach is to choose one of these stuck places and work on it systematically through the course
- No need to completely redo the whole course

The bottleneck questions (Decoding the Disciplines):

Where do my students routinely get stuck even though they are doing the work?

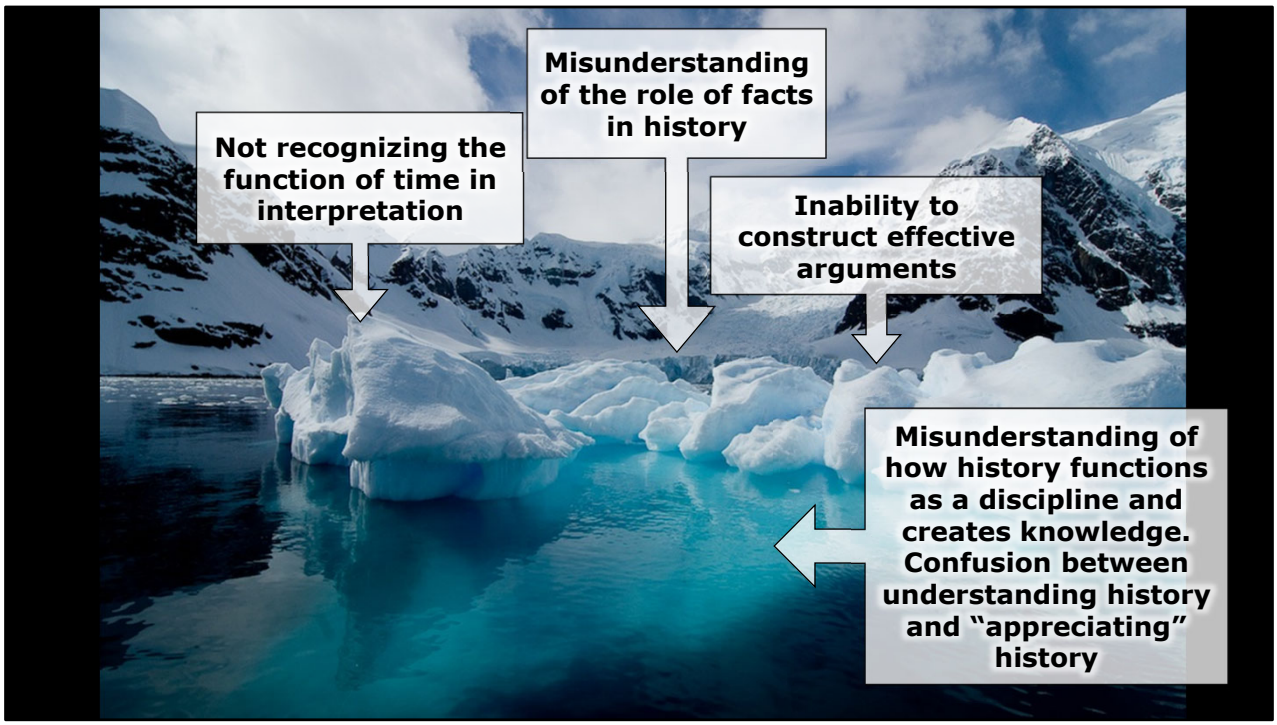
What do I do that they don't, so that I don't get stuck?

What lessons will teach them the moves and what practice do they need so they don't get stuck?

- Decoding starts with student work: where do they get stuck?
  - Underlying assumption is that students don't understand the mental moves you make without thinking
  - How to choose? What really bugs you?
- Next step: trying to uncover a path forward
  - what series of moves would get them to the place you are?
  - May not be able to know how you got there
  - In my case: what was *different* in 825 from the way things were in 817? What had changed? Reading up on the differences
  - Then a second question of how people might have responded to those differences
  - To illustrate the issue one can use familiar

material—Hamilton, for instance;

- May take a number of tries to teach the moves and for students to learn them, so spread out through the course.




- Does focus on one bottleneck leave out important things?
  - It wouldn't be the only thing you would do in your course
  - We're always leaving out things
  - But bottlenecks are linked; helping students through one often makes getting through another one easier.

The threshold concepts questions:

What are the core concepts that students need to understand fully so they can make progress in my discipline that seem to stop them at the threshold of the discipline?

What assignments and practice will help them negotiate the threshold so they can move on in the discipline?

- Threshold concepts core to the disciplines
- concepts without which students can't move forward
- Mastered concepts are rich and generative.
- Example: "cultural work" of a miracle story
  - Students may think they are supposed to believe or not as facts
  - Naïve position, personal views are actually irrelevant
    - need to understand that such stories were told for a purpose
    - as transubstantiation miracles addressed doubts about transubstantiation.
  - Once they get that concept, new understandings of medieval experience become possible.
  - Second step is the same as in working with bottlenecks

- Threshold concepts are generally not neutral, because disciplinary ways of knowing are not neutral
- But students will need to understand if not embrace them if they want to do well
- It is well for us to be aware of the ways in which they are ideological or not neutral—”cultural work” is not theological
- Epistemic switching?

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IV. Learning is doing

- Emphasis on doing—all learning involves doing
- Always true: our students learn by doing/don't learn by not doing
- Virtual environments really bring that into high relief
- Online learning depends so much on what students do
- and how well what we plan for them to do is aligned with goals for their learning
- Need to be purposeful and deliberate
- Think about their learning and not just our teaching
- Metacognition for them, but also for us