

Teaching Idea 12: How to Create interest in Colonial Spanish American History and Sources in Millennial Students in Germany?

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Miguel Cabrera. Casta Paintings. 1. Español y Mestiza, Castiza; 2. Lobo e India, Albarasado;

The topic of the pro-seminar “**Representing Imperial Subjects: Visual Culture and Identity in Early Modern Spanish America (16th – 18th century)**” was based on my current graduate dissertation. It is a topic that interests me personally and academically, but the larger question that structured the course was: How to create interest in History, Sources and particularly, Colonial Spanish American History in millennial students in Germany? Particularly students from different areas of study: Spanish Language, Economy, Pedagogy, *Lehramt*, and even Chemistry, not just students of History or Cultural Studies. That was the challenge!

I decided to propose a course that could present an overview of colonial Spanish American history through the lens of the identities of its colonial subject. The course attempted to guide discussions towards the discourses (textual and visual) that shaped the different groups that composed colonial America, for which was essential the use of primary sources (chronicles, archive documents, sumptuary laws; inquisition reports, etc.) and images (paintings, prints, statues, etc.).

Since this was my first teaching experience in a German University and with no prior knowledge on how much the students would be familiarized with Latin American history, I choose to present an overview for which the first objective of the course was set to “Encourage an appreciation for the historical experience of Latin America”, a general objective to which many students also stated their initial purpose for participating in this class.

The second objective “Stimulate active discussions from the analysis of visual and written sources” is closely linked to a more practical objective: “Develop methodological skills among its

students through the examination and analysis of colonial documents and visual images”. The initial exercises and assignments were based on introducing very basic notions of visual analysis (Panofsky) and source analysis of primary sources (Source Critique). These models would be implemented when analyzing and evaluating the sources presented throughout the course. The sessions were designed to encourage the participation of all students, for this reason the first impressions, opinions or appreciations of texts and images were a constant part of the development and active participation within the course.

The third objective “Incite inquiries on social and cultural processes of the colonial time that shaped what today is Latin America”, was reached through the session within the discussions and the questions that arose from the students themselves, questioning the colonial system, the diversity of the peoples, the systems of classification and social definition of these subjects. Additionally, the reading reports requested their opinion, comments and questions in regards to specific topics that we were dealing with in the class discussion.

For this course, as I have already mentioned, I managed to combine a variety of teaching methodologies, some brought from my previous teaching and student experience, and further from the GCSC Teaching Center courses. Based on the notion that students constitute a heterogeneous group that experience different styles of acquiring knowledge, thus the different methodological approaches applied in this course attempted to cover a wide range of dimensions to reach a variety of learning skills.

The main section of the class was based on an interactive lecture presentation. I would initially introduce the subject, certain concepts and formulate questions where the students would bring their acquired knowledge from the reading prepared for the class. The sessions were guided through Power Point slides, where a topic would be contextualized with primary written sources and visual sources, requiring students to analyze and evaluate how this material connected to the overall discussion. Additionally, even though an image and a text would be correlated, it would be up to the students to assess and evaluate how they interacted as a unifying (colonial) discourse. Class discussions were encouraged through the articulation of questions from the assigned texts and student’s inputs regarding sources. Additionally, in some occasions, students were asked to write down a series of questions based on the articles or chapters assigned for the class, this encouraged an exchange of ideas to answer each other’s doubts.

The initial tasks regarding visual analysis and source analysis were managed in small group collaboration, in order to encourage the exchange of assessments, and complementing each other’s analysis. The results of this analysis were socialized with the entire class enabling each group to complement the answers provided by the others in a collaborative work. These source analyses could also take the place of case studies, since students had to approach specific views of colonial subjects, or the specific working of colonial institutions (e.g. Inquisition, Convent, Religious Orders, etc.) in this particular historical setting. An additional group activity was the presentation of texts, this was a strategy that allowed students to perform a close reading of a text, addressing and emphasizing the relevant, interesting or provocative aspects of it, and later transmit their findings to their fellow students. Moreover, it worked as a strategy that encouraged the participation of all students, specially the shy ones, given them an opportunity to place into practice their language, synthesis and presentation skills.

The overall response from the students to this format was quite positive, the classroom experienced a constant exchange of ideas, opinions and analysis gathered from the different perspectives of the participants. We enjoyed an environment of respect and academic discussion that hopefully benefited the students as much as it benefited my own academic work.