

Reflective Teaching Portfolio

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Background

In Fall 2010 I commenced teaching at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) as an Adjunct Instructor in the Textile Development and Marketing Department. I later also began teaching in FIT's Department of International Trade and Marketing. I have now taught face-to-face and online courses in Textiles, Global Sourcing for Textiles, International Business Transactions, and International Marketing Research. In the mid-80s I also taught courses in Textiles, and Leadership at Purdue University. Although I have had professional training in adult education, I have not had academic training as a teacher.

In 2014 I began the Teaching With Technology certificate program offered by FIT's Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET). Program requirements included drafting an individual *Reflective Teaching Portfolio*. Though it initially felt onerous, the exercise has been immensely valuable to me as an instructor by forcing me to evaluate my teaching philosophy, style, practice, and effectiveness.

Teaching Philosophy and Pedagogical Style

Philosophically, I believe *the most important skills a university instructor can help her/his students build are the ability to a) find current, credible information, b) analyze that information critically, and c) apply the information to solving real world problems*. Data is easily and frequently forgotten, but sound research and analytical skills enable an individual to find the tools needed to solve their problems or complete their assigned tasks. It is the old adage about teaching a person to fish rather than giving that person a fish. *In my teaching I try to deliver content and reward students in a way that emphasizes learning concepts, identifying relationships, and thinking critically rather than rewarding students for parroting data back to me.*

While I did not seek to adopt a particular pedagogical style, *I find the Socratic teaching style (using discussion as a vehicle for transferring knowledge and assessing that transfer) both comfortable and effective in the classroom.*

Practice

Reflecting critically on my teaching practice, I divide the teaching tasks into three parts:

1. Identifying learning objectives and learning outcomes;
2. Developing and delivering content; *and*
3. Assessing student learning against desired outcomes.

1. Objectives and Outcomes. I differentiate objectives from learning outcomes as the overall result vs. specific individual results that I strive to deliver to students. In other words. Examples from recent classes I have taught include....

The objectives of TS111 are for students to build an introductory understanding of textile properties from fibers through finishes, and their impact on the properties of end products. (TS111)

The objectives of this course are to introduce students to current methods in international marketing research and give students practice undertaking and applying research methodologies to a “real world” case. (IN324)

Student learning outcomes identify specific knowledge or skills I want the students to build during the course. Examples from my syllabi for recent classes I have taught include....*At the end of this course, the students will have:*

Demonstrated the principles and tools of international marketing research. (IN324)

Demonstrated a strong working knowledge of leading online and mobile marketing research and marketing techniques. (IN324)

Recognize and accurately describe basic textile structures and the major variations of those structures. (TS111)

Evaluate the general suitability of textile materials in various consumer products. (TS111).

2. Content Delivery. For successful transfer of knowledge, *students must find the content relevant, compelling, and understandable.* For required courses, it can be difficult to effectively convey the relevance for students who have not yet embarked on their professional careers. *Sharing real examples from my industry experience helps demonstrate relevance* and I find most students respond well, particularly when I can share visual images or physical samples.

In most courses I use background reading (textbooks and/or outside readings from industry and other academic institutions). However I see my job as the Instructor, to take students beyond the background readings. For that I use highly interactive classroom discussions; PowerPoint presentations I develop from my own photos; YouTube videos and industry presentations; and my own physical samples. I emphasize visual and tactile presentations. I do not use PowerPoint presentations comprised of text and bullet points. I challenge myself to stay up to date with industry innovations, trends, and evolution and believe this is part of my responsibility as an instructor.

3. Assessment. My assessment of students' learning is comprised of quantitative and qualitative assessment. For quantitative assessment I use quizzes, exams, written assignments, and class projects for which I develop (and share in advance with the students) grading rubrics. Qualitative assessment primarily comes during class discussions, when I see what students learning (and questions) are able to articulate. *I have found rubrics to be invaluable in clarifying my expectations for a given assignment (both for students and myself), helping ensure fair and consistent grading across students, and in helping to avoid grade challenges.*

Lessons Learned

In reflecting on my teaching experiences, successes, and challenges, I have learned the following:

- **I must own each course I teach.** On occasion I have been asked to use another instructor's exercises, projects, and/or presentations. While this helps ensure consistency across sections, *I find it much more difficult to teach material other individuals have developed, as compared to teaching material I have developed myself.* As a result, when asked to insure consistency in class exercises and projects across sections, I try to work closely with the other instructor/s to co-develop those exercises and projects.
- **Setting objectives and learning outcomes.** This is critical to ensuring student success. While I believe I excel at setting objectives and learning outcomes for each course I teach, and I set/review objectives and outcomes for each individual class session just prior to that class, *I recognize that I do not articulate the learning outcomes clearly to the students in each and every class.* Communicating grading rubrics also helps insure students understand learning outcomes.
- **Conveying Relevance.** Few students will blindly accept the knowledge an instructor is trying to transfer is important to them. *One of the most important things I can do in teaching is to demonstrate the relevance in a way the students embrace.* Including guest speakers, and sharing examples from my own industry experience are good tools to help convey relevance.
- **Teaching as entertainment.** Today's students are habituated to sophisticated videos, animation, special effects, and nonlinear Internet searches that entertain as much as they inform. *Instructors today must entertain as they teach.* While I have neither the skill nor the time to incorporate highly sophisticated audiovisual techniques into my own presentations, I regularly search for publicly available, professional tools such as industry-developed websites, videos, and interactive infographics to complement my own presentations.

I mix up delivery vehicles to include limited lecture, videos, in class exercises, student presentations, etc. I move around the classroom frequently. When students interest begins to wane, I break them into small groups, give them 15 minutes to prepare a small lesson, and have them teach a particular topic to me and the class. The latter has worked particularly well for me.

- **Mini Papers.** Early in my teaching, I found students frequently came to class without completing the assigned background reading. Students' lack of preparation impeded effective class discussion, reduced overall learning, and made my job much more difficult. I have since instituted a practice of *requiring students to write "Mini Papers" on assigned readings, and to submit the Mini Paper/s electronically the evening before the class for which the reading has been assigned.* I use a simple format (3 key takeaways, as bullet points; a statement of agreement or disagreement followed by 2-3 sentences justifying the student's position or a question prompted but not answered by the reading); length is limited to $\frac{3}{4}$ page, and I grade the papers quickly online using a rubric in the online course shell. In classes with a large number of assigned readings I allow students a limited number of "free passes" they can use to skip submitting the Mini Paper/s of their choice. The free passes allow them to practice strategic time management and to feel they have some control over their coursework and learning. This practice has been so effective I now use it in nearly every course I teach.
- **Teaching with Technology.** Technology is a tremendous asset in teaching in two ways: 1) enhancing the delivery of course content; and 2) improving the efficiency of administrative tasks associated with teaching (submission of assignments, grading,...). With the plethora of technology available today (hardware and software) it can be tempting to use technology just to be using it. *The greater challenge is to identify, master, and use those technology tools that enhance the students' learning experience.*
- **Use of online platforms.** I utilize online platforms (previously ANGEL, now BlackBoard) in all my classes (face-to-face as well as online) to ensure easy student access to the Syllabus and reading assignments (outside of any assigned textbook), to collect student and grade assignments, deliver and grade quizzes and exams, and to make current grade reports available to students throughout the semester, and reduce paper consumption. During weather-related school closings, I used the online course platforms to make up for lost in-class time through interactive discussion fora.

The time I save by grading assignments and exams online allows me to allocate substantially more of my overall class preparation time to the value-added tasks: developing and delivering relevant, compelling, informative, and understandable content. I continue to challenge myself every semester to replace hard copies with digital documents.

Managing digital data effectively is key to this efficiency. Using file-naming protocols (and requiring students to do so for their digital submissions), using online grading rubrics, using automated grading for exams, and using automated grade books save tremendous mom-value-added time.

- **Using my own images and documents in class.** I believe *one of my best assets as an instructor, is the wealth of industry experience I bring to my students*. In addition to sharing my experiences orally in the classroom, I use my extensive collection of photographic images in the PowerPoint presentations I develop and show. I also assign key industry studies I have authored as background reading. Many students have commented positively on this.
- **Being comfortable with discomfort.** I am not a technology expert. However, I have finally achieved a level of *comfort with not being a technology expert*. This shift in attitude allows me to explore greater use of those technology tools with which I am comfortable already, and to seek to learn new tools that would be useful but which I have not yet used. It also allows me to accept and sometimes adopt technology my students present.
- **Students' overload.** One of the biggest challenges I find in teaching at FIT, is the workload most FIT students carry. Consistently, students in my classes have been carrying heavy academic loads, plus working an internship, plus often working a paid part-time job. Many also have lengthy commutes to/from FIT each day. Realistically, this leaves little time for homework, and that time must be divided among several courses all competing for time. While some suggest the "flipped classroom" as an answer to this dilemma, and others offer time in class for students to work on group projects, *I challenge myself repeatedly to make my homework as efficient and effective as possible to maximize students' learning in the given time*.
- **Dealing with student discipline.** Sadly, I have had students who plagiarized work, and other student discipline issues. *In my experience, one of the effective tools for a successful outcome, has been to ask the offending student how s/he would reconcile the situation if s/he were in my position*. While I may not issue the same consequences as the student would, it make the student a party to determining the consequences rather than an adversary.
- **Dealing with difficult students.** Having been trained many years ago as a paraprofessional counselor, and having had training in handling emergency situations, I am comfortable with many of the kinds of disruptive events that can happen while teaching (whether related to the university experience or not). *However, I find it challenging to determine the best way to manage difficult and/or disruptive students in the classroom. This is an area in which I*

would like more training or guidance so I can be better prepared when an incident occurs.

Way Forward

I only remain relevant and effective as an instructor if I stay current in my industry knowledge, remain effective in transferring knowledge to students, and I continue to improve the efficiency with which I do the non-value-added administrative tasks associated with teaching, so that I can allocate the majority of my effort to enhancing students' learning. Technology will play an increasingly important role in remaining up to date in my own knowledge, delivering content to students in a relevant, compelling, and understandable way, and completing the administrative tasks efficiently. *Technology will be my best friend but I must use it wisely*, in a way that adds value, not use technology just for technology's sake.