

Reflective Teaching Portfolio

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I attended the FIT Center for Excellence in Teaching Certificate Event “Teaching with Technology” on June 9/10, 2020. My reflective teaching portfolio outlines my philosophy in respect to teaching and interacting with students, and specifically where I see the value of using technology in teaching.

My Teaching Philosophy

I believe that learning is based on a foundation of deep understanding that only flourishes when students internalize and actively apply knowledge in ways that are meaningful to them and creative. For classes I teach I like to establish an environment and atmosphere that reflects that of a ‘real world’ design consultancy rather than that of a theoretical college classroom. Students, while responsible for their individually crafted projects, constantly collaborate with everyone else in the class just like a multidisciplinary agency design team. Our goal is to develop and articulate groundbreaking ideas together that are driven by innovative thinking and inspire students personally and professionally. I want students to wrestle with the course material as part of their own lives, applying the theories we discuss to what they experience in their everyday world.

The college environment should provide a stage for students, that builds a bridge between freely exploring extraordinary (maybe sometimes utopian) ideas and understanding the restraints the real business world will inevitably impose on them. A big obstacle when transitioning from college to a job is to only then become aware of how much business realities drive ideation and decision-making.

I strive to bring a lot of energy to my class – If I don't get excited about my course, why should my students? Key is to convey to students that a crucial part of the creative profession is to approach everything you do with enthusiasm and creativity, including project deliverables that may seem purely strategic, data-driven, and analytical. I want to inspire my students to think about everything we learn and do together in class with a fresh and critical mindset. I do not encourage them to just take for granted and apply established approaches, when they in fact have interesting ideas for different, unbiased ways of addressing particular challenges.

The teachers I have had who stand out in my memory have several attributes in common: they presented their course subjects in ways that caught my interest, clarified complex topics, and put knowledge into context so that its relevance became apparent. These role models have

deeply influenced my approach to teaching: I view myself primarily as a facilitator of learning, rather than as an expert who solely delivers information to students. It's critical for me to convey to my students on an every-day-basis that they do not sit in my class to simply listen to what I have to say and show! One of the most enjoyable parts of teaching for me is to connect with fresh, ambitious, and aspiring minds that are not afraid of looking at established things in a new and different way. I let students know that my reason for asking them questions is often not because I know the single definitive answer; often it is because I am genuinely interested in their take on a specific subject matter.

I am an advocate of active learning and use a variety of untraditional methods to encourage discussion and interaction on the issues the course presents. We apply analogical brainstorming techniques to ideate and explore new methodologies for our projects – a thrilling exercise that provides access to a broader range of tools to both students and me.

In summary, I am truly committed to providing a learning environment that is both exciting and rigorous, one that empowers both students and myself in pursuing new ways of approaching challenges in the design field. Above all, I treat my students with the utmost respect, creating a positive atmosphere where students feel safe and confident to candidly discuss new topics and openly share their individual ideas.

Successful versus unsuccessful Classes

I do not necessarily measure a class' success by how closely it went as planned before walking into the classroom. From my perspective the degree of success of a class is defined by the degree of student engagement. In the past I have experienced several classes I taught that generated extraordinary exciting discussions about specific topics or segments I had scheduled for. While we ended up spending much more time than planned on specific topics, for me it is important to provide students with ample opportunity to share their perspectives, in particular when expressed lively and compassionate. I ended up having to push certain topics I had planned to tackle to the following week, but I know that students enjoyed that class and left it with a sense of being heard and involved. Generally, results have been affected very positively by that approach.

Additional Technology Features I am planning to incorporate into my Classes

Over the course of the spring semester 2020 I have taught several classes at various design schools that then became affected by the Covid-19 related move to exclusive online teaching. Though I have been in the fortunate position of teaching classes that tend to lend themselves to an online format, the sudden move to remote teaching and learning certainly provided significant challenges. One of the main complaints I heard from students in general has been the

lack of motivation, though this was obviously very much driven by the anxiety and uncertainty that this crisis has brought upon everyone.

I believe that there is real opportunity in this moment of time also: Among other things, it has become much easier to invite and have attend guest speakers to classes, now that everyone has become so familiar with online video conferencing and people from the industry are also looking for additional 'social' exposure. I have already lined up several thought leaders from my field of expertise for brief appearances during fall classes I am scheduled to be teaching.

Another exciting feature I am planning to incorporate into my classes, based on Jeffrey's presentation, is padlet. What a wonderful way for interacting and brainstorming together! What I found in particular interesting, is how the online experience allows for engaging potentially more effectively with the four different types of students Jeffrey defined. I have certainly experienced all of these student types in every single class I have taught in the past, and I think it's fascinating how digital tools can be used for improving the engagement with all students in class (for example, shy students to become more outgoing by allowing them to express themselves in non-traditional ways).

Blackboard, Voicethread, Canvas are tools I have been using for a while and will continue to leverage. Youtube and Vimeo videos that introduce designers and their point of view on relevant course topics are also an excellent way to enhance the learning experience. Additionally, they help building the crucial bridge between school and real-world application, which I tend to find extremely valuable for the learning experience in my classes.

How Expanding the Use of Technology will affect my Teaching Practice

Technology is a wonderful tool to improve teaching as well as learning efficiency. From my perspective it is critical to never leverage technology just because it is available and perceived to be more cutting edge. It really needs to add value for both the instructor AND the student. If the use of a certain technology makes my life and an instructor easier, but compromises on the value the student gets from my class, I can't implement it. Likewise, introducing technologies that seem to make specific class exercises fun and more engaging, but take away from the larger learning process, also shouldn't be considered.

There are many tools however that serve both, and I continuously scan the wide range of technology offerings in order to provide my students with the most advanced learning experience they could ask for.

How will a more Technology-driven Classroom Experience affect the Student Experience?

Adding technology to the course experience from my perspective serves two equally important purposes:

1. When using technology effectively as a support tool for the right kinds of activities it will enhance the learning process for students and increase their level of engagement. It will also make it easier for course participants to repeat and further deep-dive into specific topics on their own time after class.
2. The use of technology in the business world, not just because of COVID-19, will continue to increase dramatically over the coming years. Using technology in the classroom does not only support the delivery of learning outcomes for that specific class, it additionally teaches 'use of technology' to students that soon enough will enter the business world and are expected to be familiar with the latest technology tools.

Of course, as with many things in life, finding the right balance between human interaction and use of technology in the learning environment will be critical in order to provide students with the best learning experience possible.