

Teaching Philosophy

I am a firm believer that teaching should always be a two-way interaction between an instructor and students. As an instructor, I feel that I play multiple roles in a classroom--a facilitator with humor and wisdom, a guardian with patience and care, a role model with insights and values, and a parent with love and consideration. Students should always be at the center of teaching— I have been trying to actively engage students based on their needs, abilities, and interests.

A Chinese proverb states: “Tell me, I’ll forget; show me, I’ll remember; Involve me, I’ll understand.” When students are engaged, all of their senses including hearing, seeing, feeling, touching are fired up, which stimulates their learning and creates a lasting impact. To do that, I have tried different teaching methods to engage students in my classroom. For example, in teaching the role of information technologies (IT) in today’s business, instead of going through slides showing how IT would affect every aspect of businesses, I asked my class to read before class an article written by a well-known author expressing a contentious view of IT impact, then when they came to class, divided them into two sides debating the benefits and issues with using information technologies. Through the discussions, students quickly realized that the outcomes of using an information technology were affected not only by the technology itself, but also by organizational and social factors. The common assumption that using an advanced information technology would bring immediate benefits would be wrong; rather, a careful planning and implementation with targeted support would be needed to ensure positive benefits from IT. After the class, I asked the students to write a reflection based on the discussion.

Through the pre-class preparation, in-class debate, and after-class reflection, students were given a chance to develop own thinking, learn from peers, and think critically by synthesizing different views/opinions. The design seemed to be effective, as shown in the students’ feedback below.

“All the thanks goes to YOU! In my four years in Ryerson, I’ve only had a handful of Professors that really knew how to motivate their students. Suffice to say, I think you’ve done a fabulous job and I wish I had you as a Professor before ITM700.”

“Overall, I believe your style of a collaborative and slightly competitive learning environment is extremely effective, especially for this level.”

Encouraged by the students’ positive responses, I tried more experiments in my class, especially as my class size increased over time. I strived to design simple, easy to implement, but relevant and engaging activities. For example, one session was about business process identification. For students who had no or limited work experience, business process was a foreign concept for them to grasp. However, students who enrolled to the course were required to work for a real client and solve business process issues faced by the client by providing a technology solution. How to teach them the concept and equip them with knowledge and skills to work with their client to identify a business process?

To achieve the objectives, I used the exercise of folding paper planes. I first showed a video teaching them how to fold paper planes, and then asked students to work in groups to make paper planes. Each group had ten minutes to get paper sheets, fold paper planes, and test out the quality of each plane. Suddenly, the classroom was full of noises, motions, and flying planes. Students were busy working, chuckling from time to time about the planes made by their team mates. When time was up, all groups stopped. I then asked the class to think about what happened in the

ten minutes and capture the process of folding airplanes in a process diagram. Each individual had to complete the task in ten minutes and submit it to D2L. Some drew by hand, and some used a diagramming app.

Once they submitted their work, I randomly selected some diagrams to review with class. To their amazement, no one got their process the same! That means, despite the fact that everyone went through the same process, no one conceptualized the process the same way!

This really captured the students' attention! I then discussed the concept and components of a process, explained the challenges faced in capturing a process (as demonstrated in the paper plane exercise), and showed them techniques that could be used to get an accurate representation of a process.

As indicated above, I used multiple media, engaged all individuals in class, employed peer learning, inspired critical thinking, and transformed the classroom learning to a field study of business process. Subsequent submissions of students work on business process from their project with their client show a great improvement in quality!

"Teaching is not a profession; it is a passion," said by John F. Podojil. I couldn't agree more. Preparing for those experiments/exercises required a lot of thinking and planning to ensure that those activities fit course objectives, feasible for the size and level of the class, and were relevant, engaging, and conducive to enriched learning. My strongest motivation to engage in quality teaching derives from my passion for teaching. I love to interact with students, engage them in classroom, and enhance their learning curiosity. To me, nothing is more exciting than inspiring a whole class of students to tirelessly discuss heated subjects; nothing is more rewarding than seeing my students exhilarated by learning. It is my greatest satisfaction that students are able to apply what they have learned to real-world situations.

My effort in experiential learning went beyond classroom. After teaching for several years the capstone project course (in which about-to-graduate students were required to work for a real client for two semesters and solve the real issue faced by the client), I quickly discovered that while the project offered a real IT work experience (and potential job opportunities) to students, not all students were able to fully enjoy the benefits due to the obstacles in identifying a real client and managing group work.

To help students address the challenges, from 2014-2017, I voluntarily offered an information session in March to students who would take the course in the coming Fall semester (when the bulk of students took the course). In the session, I described course requirements and urged students to find a client before the Fall semester started and to group with students not based on friendship but on professionalism and work ethic. In addition, I worked with the TRSM Business Career Hub to offer sales pitch workshops and organize a social networking event to help students identify interested organizations.

As the course coordinator, I have become the first point of contact for potential clients and all students. When working with an interested client, I explained the nature and benefits of the project, and worked with each organization closely to identify a project that was suitable for the course requirements. When working with student groups, I helped them to develop an interesting group profile demonstrating their ability to fit the required deliverables in the client's projects, and offered my tips on how they should prepare for client meetings.

To facilitate my communications with students and student-student communications, with the help of TRSITM admin staff, I developed a Google Forum dedicated to capstone project students. All new students were enrolled to the forum, so they could look for group members. I developed

course project documents for students to get more detailed understandings of the project and the project brochure which they could share with potential clients. Those documents were downloadable from the Google Forum.

Understanding that students lacked consulting skills required to work effectively with their client and project management skills needed to manage their group project, I designed and developed training workshops and organized their delivery in Spring/Summer 2017. Through the workshops delivered by industry professionals, students learned potential issues they would encounter with their client and challenges in managing their project, and were prepared to handle the issues and address the challenges. Ultimately, students would have a rewarding learning experience from the capstone project, and with students being able to work more effectively on the project, clients would be satisfied with working our students, and willing to support more student projects.

However, as Max DePree once indicated, “We cannot become what we want to be by remaining what we are.” I consciously realize that I need to constantly hone my teaching skills to keep improving the quality of my teaching. Therefore, I continuously examine new teaching methodologies, and challenge myself to find innovative approaches to make learning inspiring, enjoyable and effective. Attending the conference and workshops organized by the Ryerson Learning and Teaching Office is one effective way to expose myself to different teaching methods and learn from my peers. In addition, I have involved industry practitioners, especially clients who sponsored student projects, in course review, and based on their feedback, revised course content and requirements to ensure relevance of my teaching. I have experimented in my class the popular tools (e.g., Visio, Wrike) used by industry professionals. Moreover, I have published teaching cases to help me stay current. Furthermore, I have applied and been awarded Teaching Innovation Fund four times from 2016 to 2017, which has allowed me to experiment new approach/tool/methods to teaching.

As Mr. William Arthur Ward said, “The mediocre teacher tells, the good teacher explains, the superior teacher demonstrates, the great teacher inspires.” The main goal behind the student-centered interactive approach is to create an inspiring, supportive, and enjoyable learning environment. I always challenge my students to think critically and put their best efforts forward. And students were motivated to aim high in their capstone project.

“Thank you for always pushing me to always do more and do better for the best outcome. It was an honor to be in your class. You revealed to me a lot of values that I need to work in the near future to become a better professional”

“I wanted to thank you again for how much work you put into our project. You constantly guided and motivated us which was a major contribution to the success of the project. Thank you for spending your personal time to help us through all the rough patches. It means a lot to me (and I’m sure the rest of the group) that you were so active in our education.”

Teaching at a university is a great honor. It is an honor to be able to develop and influence future generations by instilling them with new knowledge and ideas, and by inspiring them to be critical thinkers. With the honor also comes the great responsibility: the responsibility of not only helping students succeed in university studies, but also helping them score well in their real exams--life. Powered by my passion for teaching, I have been challenging myself, and will continue to do so, to fulfill this great responsibility!