

Reflection on Teaching Experience

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During my doctoral training, I have had the opportunity to teach or facilitate several courses, all of which have provided a unique opportunity to learn about my teaching style and improve my skills. The following offers a reflection upon each of the courses I have led or facilitated, along with information pertaining to strengths, weaknesses, and implications for my future teaching opportunities.

Resident Assistant Class (The University of Tulsa)

Prior to returning to school full-time, and while working at the University of Tulsa, I had the opportunity to teach two different classes for student housing staff, or Resident Assistants. The first course was an in-service course that provided the students with on-going training during the first semester in their staff position. I was responsible for designing and facilitating a series of monthly seminars that would target the needs of new staff members who had already been through an extensive training program. During my employment at TU, I also had the opportunity to teach a pre-service course to a similar group of student staff members the semester prior to them beginning their positions with the department. In this case, I was responsible for providing a general overview of the position that was meaningful to the students, would increase their motivation regarding the position, and would provide them with sufficient information to allow them to prepare for their position over the summer months.

In each of these cases, a format had been established by my predecessors, though it was apparent from prior evaluations that modifications were necessary to maintain student interest in the sessions. As such, I incorporated guest presenters into both classes to allow students to meet additional resources across the university. I modified the individual projects to make them more meaningful to the new staff members, further adding value to the class. Additionally, instead of the traditional lecture format, more activities were added to each session to increase their attention and promote their learning. Since facilitating these classes, they have remained experiential, and the projects have continued to evolve to be of benefit to the students and their residents.

AS 1111 – Freshman Orientation (Oklahoma State University)

Upon returning to full-time status, I chose to teach a Freshman Orientation course through the College of Arts & Sciences. This course is designed to be 1-credit hour, and is intended to prepare first semester students for the college experience and providing them with necessary resources to become successful. Prior to beginning the course, I was provided with materials including a common syllabus and homework activities. I modified the syllabus to make it more understandable, and began arranging presenters to discuss the variety of topics that the students needed to learn. By the beginning of the semester, I had presenters scheduled to facilitate about half of the sessions, and I was prepared to facilitate the others. Upon receiving the course evaluations at the end of the semester, I noted numerous comments about the usefulness of the material. Two possible reasons entered my mind. First, some of the presentations were lectures about relatively simple material, which did not provide an opportunity to truly experience and understand the information being covered. Second, however, was that I had not managed to connect with several of the students, thus helping them to make the course individually meaningful.

This semester I taught two additional sections of Freshman Orientation. As I prepared the schedule, I only arranged two guest presenters and chose to facilitate the other sessions myself in order to make them more interactive. I made sure to get to class even earlier than last year to talk to students as they arrived, and made sure to talk to students as they left as well. I attempted to involve each student as best as possible and endeavored to connect with all of them in the process.

The experience of teaching Freshman Orientation has taught me that I need to find a way to connect to each student, even if the students do not feel the material is meaningful or necessary to them, thereby making the material more meaningful. I attempted to modify the course this semester by making the class sessions more interactive and by providing additional flexibility on the assignments. Many students have given me positive feedback upon the course, though the evaluations themselves will tell me if a few students still felt detached.

EPSY 1003 – Learning to Learn (Oklahoma State University)

This course was the first in-class, 3-credit hour course for which I have been responsible. It is designed to provide students with introductory information regarding learning theory while providing them tools to become successful students. At the start of the first semester teaching this course, I worked with another instructor who was teaching a different section. We decided to develop PowerPoint slides for each of the modules as none had been created previously. It provided a solid structure for each class, though we quickly noticed that the students were bored with the material. By the first exam, we had begun altering our presentation style, relying very little upon the slides. Instead, we began to incorporate more activities within the class sessions, and attempted to make the discussions more interactive. We utilized more group work, and students seemed to be more interested in the material.

At the conclusion of the first semester, I was comfortable in the classroom facilitating the learning process of my students. At the start of the second semester, I felt more uncomfortable for the first few weeks. I quickly noticed that my discomfort was due to not yet knowing my students, and I remedied my discomfort by increasing my interactions with them prior to and after class. By the end of the second semester, I was more comfortable teaching and more confident in my knowledge of the material. The students also became more interested, as evidenced by the course evaluations.

EPSY 3413 – Child & Adolescent Development (Oklahoma State University)

For the past two semesters, I have had the opportunity to teach *Child & Adolescent Development*. While this course is offered both in class and online, I have taught both semesters entirely online. This experience has been very informative, as I had not previously understood what was involved in teaching an online class. Online teaching requires extra set-up time being spent prior to the semester beginning, and it requires a different type of interaction with students, many of whom you do not meet directly as you would in a traditional class. The first semester I taught the course was during an eight-week summer session. The course proceeded quickly, and did not allow much time to interact with the students or make modifications as the course progressed. As such, I kept a record of my thoughts as the semester continued, and made many of the updates prior to teaching it again this semester.

While I am personally more comfortable in an in-class setting, whether as a teacher or as a student, I recognize that many of my students are more comfortable in this asynchronous setting. Additionally,

some students are only able to take the course online due to scheduling conflicts. Because of these advantages, online courses will likely increase in the future, and this experience has been highly beneficial to me. In future online courses, I will attempt to provide opportunities for students to interact with myself and their fellow students outside of class to make the online experience more meaningful.

Undergraduate Research Mentorship (Langston University)

In fulfilling a program requirement for the Preparing Future Faculty fellowship program, I have the unique opportunity to co-facilitate a non-credit, research mentorship program at Langston University. A fellow doctoral student and I are mentoring a group of eight psychology students and assisting them to develop research studies that they will ultimately present at a statewide professional conference in April. Many of these students have not had any experience with research, though a few have had an introductory statistics or experimental psychology course. We have spent most of semester helping them narrow their topics into researchable questions, and are now helping them determine their individual research methodology, including the selection or development of instruments.

Overall, this experience has been highly educational. I have been considering research in a different way and at a different level than I would have done otherwise. It is helping me to understand the difference in my research experience compared to that of my students, and has therefore helped me learn to teach them more effectively at their own developmental level. We have also varied our teaching strategies as attendance has fluctuated, including utilizing a combination of presentations, discussions, and individual work. This has allowed us to identify teaching strategies that are more effective in this environment. The varied attendance has also increased both our planning and our flexibility, allowing us to be more successful overall.

Non-College Populations

In addition to these experiences teaching traditional college students, I have had the opportunity to interact with students at other levels as well. Through my participation in the Project CREATES research team, I have had the opportunity to observe various elementary school classrooms to conduct qualitative research. I have spent time in a variety of third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms in several schools in the Tulsa area. Additionally, through my experience giving presentations at professional conferences as well as through the Educational Psychology Student Society, I have had the opportunity to teach adults on a variety of topics ranging from research interests to leadership theory and student housing issues. These experiences have taught me the necessity of adapting my presentation style to the needs and abilities of my audience.

Summary

Because of these various teaching experiences, I have had an opportunity to learn and grow as a teacher and a scholar. I have taught through a variety of course formats, which will help me to become better rounded in my approach to future courses. I have made and learned from mistakes that I will be able to apply to my future student interactions to enhance the learning environment for all involved. Evidence of some of these experiences is provided on the following pages.