Center for Excellence in Teaching FIT

REFLECTIVE TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Sunghee Kim, Adjunct Professor
Department of Fashion Business Management, FIT
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My teaching philosophy

Whenever I am asked to talk about my teaching philosophy, I start my talk with this sentence – "Teaching someone something is all about sharing knowledge using communication skills." Teaching activity often considered as 'delivering knowledge' rather than sharing one. However, I firmly believe that teaching activity is giving and receiving knowledge at the same time. Therefore, the action can be appropriately described as 'sharing' rather than 'delivering' knowledge. This belief came from my prior teaching experience; whenever I teach students a subject, I learned something from both the teaching activity and students' feedback. I usually prepare for my class by imaging the scenario for each session. A session, however, never goes as I imagined because students' questions and feedback are like 'alive animal.' If my class flows as I imagined, I could not learn a new one thru the teaching activity.

However, students always make a brand-new question, and it stimulates my brain and makes me learn from answering the question. This process could be possible because my teaching activity is based on 'communication' rather than 'talking.' Recognizing this property of teaching, I talk to students on the first day of a class - "I am teaching you this subject through this class, but you also teach me by giving me feedback and making questions." By emphasizing the 'two-way' interaction of teaching activity, I could have been making students actively participate in the class, letting students recognize that they are also a sender of a message to the instructor. The word 'communication' literally requires two parties – sender and receiver of a message - and the activities by the two parties have the same weight. It means that both teachers and students must 'understand' each other for communication. 'Understanding' each other could be interpreted in various ways, but I see the process of understanding as a process of conversation. The location of a conversation does not have to be a classroom. The process of understanding each other starts from when content to be shared is defined and ends when the shared information makes both students and teachers have a new perspective on the subject matter. Again, I believe that teachers are not just a person who 'deliver' a knowledge, but a person who 'share' a knowledge with students. Admittedly, teachers are experts on a specific subject matter, and the level of knowledge is higher than that of students. However, it does not necessarily mean that teachers always know more things in all fields of study than students do. Sometimes students might know more than teachers do in a specific subject matter. Also, various students' background forms a unique perspective on a particular subject matter, the view making a unique question. The question may lead both students and teachers to think about something in a new perspective, and it ends up giving a clue for new knowledge to both students and teachers. I firmly believe that teachers are not standing 'above' students but standing 'with' students. By doing so, teachers can make students 'active participants' of a class, and the process of 'sharing' knowledge can finally be circulated and never ends.

My most successful lesson

Since the unprecedented COVID-19 situation happened in early 2020, all classes were converted from in-person to remote mode. The remote environment was very new to me, so I was anxious about making a class and letting students feel as they are in the real classroom. Thanks to the full support from school and the CET lectures, this Spring 2020 semester became the most successful semester for both students and me. This spring, I taught Statistical Analysis and Team Development Workshop remotely. Statistical Analysis subjects consist of two components; Lecture and Lab. Lecture portion is a classical method of teaching as many teachers do, and Lab session is about utilizing computer application to process given data using statistics knowledge learned from the lecture. Team Development Workshop is all about sharing knowledge of building a successful team and how to operate the team to be the best.

What I wanted to form my class the most is to make my class environment as similar to the in-person mode as possible. Since my students had been taking all of the courses on in-person mode so far, I naturally came up with the idea of setting my studio similar to in-person mode. I set all electronic devices in the real classroom where the class was supposed to proceed. Because the webcam embedded in my laptop does not provide a high-definition mode, I bought a new one that supports HD mode. Also, I utilized the in-class computing devices, including the projector and screen. I set all the in-class devices as I proceed with my class in an in-person manner. I turned on the in-class computer and the projector, and the class material – PowerPoint slides – was projected on the screen. Also, I stood in front of the whiteboard so that students can feel as they are in the real classroom. The tablet device was also set up, and it is used whenever I need to write something on the PowerPoint slide. Students could see the class material on one screen and the classroom where I am standing in. I never sat down on the chair. I looked at both my computer screen and the projection screen at the same time. Everything was the same as in-person mode except the place where the students are. This effort made the class 'quasi-remote' environment; the class itself proceeded in a remote environment, but students could feel as they are in the real classroom.

This made both students and me feel comfortable to have communication, and this method successfully formed the natural communication environment. As noted earlier, I believe that both students and teachers learn something from each other, and the key to the teaching process is 'communication.' To make the communication successful, establishing a good communication environment is essential, and I believe the way I used this semester made a good environment for communicating with each other.

Thankfully, students were very satisfied with both classes, and the level of satisfaction was illustrated by the students' evaluation score of 4.9 out of 5.0. The technology I used this semester helped me overcome the difficulties I was faced with – making class as it were in in-person mode, and both courses were successfully completed with the highest satisfaction score.

My unsuccessful lesson

I taught Basic Mathematics in the Fall 2019 semester. This course is for only students who did not meet the minimum math score requirements or need basic math training. There were only six students in the course because most of the students other than them met the minimum requirements, and only a few students needed to take the course. I thought the class would be very successful since the number of students was small enough for me to take care of each. However, it was not easy. I did my best to take care of each student so that all students could follow a chapter without difficulties. I also took all of the questions from each student because the primary purpose of the course is to make them do the math at a basic level with no difficulties. However, taking all the questions and providing answers to them made the speed of class much slower than I expected. Some of the students whose math level is high compared to other students experienced wait time until the other students complete solving a given problem.

The challenges from this experience were how to adjust the course level and speed. Looking back, I recognized that I had a hard time communicating with each of the students enough. If I had successfully communicated with each student, I could have been available to take care of all of the students by providing an extra work to those students who are waiting for other students until slow learners complete so that they also could feel they are still taken care of.

Expanding the use of technology into my teaching

Using technology in the teaching process now became essential. Specifically, this COVID-19 situation made us use some technology that helps us remove the limitation of time and place. The remote mode classes will necessarily use technology to broadcast the class to any place where students are. Also, teachers are asked to proceed with a class no matter which time zone applies to their students. The use of technology may enhance the communication process. The communication process needs a media that deliver a message to each party, and technology can be the media of the message.

I often use the ‘poll’ feature of an online conferencing tool when a session proceeds in remote mode to promote students to participate in a peer review session actively. One of my experiences tells that not all students enjoy talking thru the cam, and making Google form takes a lot of time, but I still need to make them active to answer my question. So I often make polls with ‘short format question’ and let students click among given choices, such as ‘Disagree,’ ‘Neutral,’ and ‘Agree.’ This way helps me achieve the ‘maximum level’ of students' participation, and it has been working well so far.

Technology also saves time. Until Fall 2019, I made a paper-based exam, and I had to take at least three (even a week!) days to mark scores and complete the score report. Unlike the prior semester, all the exam I made was computer-based because of COVID-19 situation, and all of the students had to take the exam online. The exam was on Blackboard or publisher-provided platform, and all questions were marked on a real-time basis. Thanks to this technology, students could receive a score report as soon as they complete the exam and got feedback right after the completion. Providing the score and feedback timely enhanced students’ needs, and those processes helped them figure out which part they are weak or strong at timely.

Technology innovations affecting both the student experience and my experience

The innovation of technology had changed our way of life entirely. For example, paper mail was one of the mostly used communication media in the past. Since the e-mail tech was innovated, the frequency of paper mail usage dramatically decreased, and the e-mail tech became a media that people mostly use. Like this example, tech innovation affects all parties in class.

Technology would let the way of teaching be changed. The innovation of technology would affect my experience, and I believe teachers must adopt those innovations and learn how to use those technologies. Before Microsoft made the PowerPoint application, most teachers used a paper-based class material. However, nowadays, the mostly used teaching materials are made in PowerPoint slide format. This innovation changed the way of teaching. Teachers could finally be able to show animated and multimedia materials! The development of technology enables teachers to communicate with students more effectively by sharing the various format of class materials using a computer.

Another example is the invention of a tablet PC. It enables students to take notes on a class material with no use of paper and pencil. No one could imagine a class with no papers and pencils, but it now became a reality! The innovation of technology has been changing the class environment.

The technology innovations even made all of us respond to the COVID-19 successfully. Most of the teachers thought the converting all in-person classes to remote mode would not be possible. However, real-time conferencing technology made it possible, and it went well. The innovations will keep affecting both teachers' and students' experience in the educational institution, and we both need to be ready to adopt new technology so that the communication between the two can become effective more than ever before.

New teaching ideas I plan to implement as a result of this technology certificate program

In the technology certificate program, new teamwork supporting platform – Padlet – was introduced. I thought the platform would be very useful if I introduce the platform in my future course.

I learned that using technology would solve the challenges I experienced from the Basic Mathematics course. I am thinking of utilizing 'Padlet' or any other teamwork application during the math class. Once I give an in-class question, all students may be asked to access a blank Padlet. Each student will solve the math question in their own space and post it to the Padlet so that all students can see each other's solutions. Some students may complete early, and some other students may take more time to complete. Or, some students could not be able to solve those questions without help. At this time, I would like to ask a student who completes the early and would ask the student to share his/her idea about the solution on a Padlet so that the student can help another student.

New technology tools/approaches contributing to my classroom practice

The 'Padlet' platform introduced during the program would contribute to my practice very positively. Until now, I let students use their own papers when they solve a specific math question and asked them how they solved the question. The only way to share his/her solution with other students was to let he/she come to the front and write it down in the whiteboard again. This way was not bad, but it still needs time until the student duplicates his/her solution on the whiteboard. Also, a student who is asked to come in front sometimes felt uncomfortable because he/she did not like to stand in front of other students. Sharing students' notes on the 'Padlet' platform may remove those barriers to students. Writing and sharing their own solutions on the 'Padlet' clip would naturally enable all students to see each other's solutions and refer to other students' solutions with no difficulties. If it needs the student's further explanation, the student could be asked to do so, but he/she does not have to be in front of a crowd. This way could make all students feel comfortable and share their idea with no issues.

Evaluating the success of my activities

The easiest way of evaluating the success of the idea I implemented would be a score from students' evaluation at the end of the semester. With the formal evaluation process, I would keep communicating with students and get feedback from them about whether the way of teaching I used was effective in their study. Continuous communication is the most effective way of taking each other's thoughts, and I would encourage students to let me know whether they feel comfortable when I use those new methodologies.

Also, I would see the level of student achievement at the end of the semester. Even though students felt comfortable, the activities I implemented would not be successful if the way I used did not contribute to the improvement of a student's level of achievement. So, I would see the combination of the feedback from students and student's achievements to conclude whether my activities were successful.

Bigger picture regarding technology and learning

The use of technology in class became an essential part of teaching. Notably, using real-time conferencing technology became the best alternative of in-person mode class. We all can not avoid the borderless class environment, which naturally requires all of us to adopt the new technology in the learning process. I would like to revisit my teaching philosophy – teaching someone something is all about sharing knowledge using communication skills. The technology could be any form, and it would help us communicate with each other in various ways. Also, the technology could help us sharing our knowledge, and we must be ready to use an innovative technology so that teachers and students could 'sync' in a specific topic of a class easier and more effectively. Augmented Reality (AR) would be the next technology that would come into the classroom broader, and the experience of a class would be much different from the one in the past. Teachers somehow need to lead the flow of learning, so I believe that teachers must be educated continuously not only about a subject-specific topic but also about the technology as a means of communicating with students effectively. This cycle will innovate the learning process as technology become innovative.