Teaching Demonstration Reflection Paper

Active Teaching and Learning: Challenges in the Online Teaching Environment

Active learning is something I value as a teacher and a student, so when I began planning my teaching demonstration, active learning was my first priority. I've had quite a lot of teaching experience in a face-to-face environment and felt confident that I could successfully plan a ten-minute learning activity. The fact that this would be in an online environment did make me nervous because I couldn't predict how I would feel when teaching online. I found, as I gave the teaching demonstration in class, that incorporating active learning when teaching online is much more time-consuming (and a bit more difficult) than in the face-to-face classroom.

My teaching style has been shaped by my own learning experiences as a long-time student. One of my best and most memorable learning experiences was in a class I took as an undergraduate English major. Most of my courses were on texts and most of my assignments involved reading and then analyzing and making connections between these texts. I was good at this and enjoyed it quite a bit, but my junior year I took a film class and found that it was much easier and more enjoyable for me to analyze, critique, and write about films than about written texts. I'm a very visual learner and it was easier for me to see themes play out on a screen than to read them in a book. Of course, I'd been watching movies (in addition to reading books) my whole life, but I'd never written a scholarly paper about film before I took that class and found that I was more of a visual learner than a verbal learner. Learning how effective it can be to have a visual object to write about prompted me, when I was teaching writing, to incorporate images and movie clips to get visual learners more engaged. This was one of my first conscious experiences where I found that different styles of learning are more effective for different people.

My teaching style has been shaped by various teaching experiences. For three years I taught English composition classes and used the classroom as a laboratory to try a variety of

different teaching styles and methods. I found that I enjoy leading discussion, prefer not to give lectures, and like to have students present what they know to the class. In my church life, I'm currently the music teacher for the children in the congregation. This is one of my first experiences working with children and I'm finding that kinesthetic learning can be very useful not just for getting songs into their heads, but also to keep the children engaged. I'm not a kinesthetic learner, myself, so I have to consciously think about how to help the children use their bodies as we learn new songs. Often, (especially if they're getting restless) I'll have them stand up and "pitch lead" with their bodies – bend their knees or raise their arms as the pitches we sing go higher and lower. Also, many of the children enjoy "acting out" the words to different songs. My latest experiences with teaching have been library workshops in the University of Illinois library central reference department, where I've learned that teaching a step-by-step "how to use this resource" workshop is not as easy as it sounds.

For my teaching demonstration in LIS 458: Instruction and Assistance Systems, I picked one specific aspect of *Chicago Manual of Style Online* on which to focus, so that the ten minutes would be directed toward an appropriate amount of material for the time allotted. The choice that I made early in the process of creating the teaching demonstration was that we would look mainly at "how to find citation rules," since that seems like the most common use of the manual. I wanted to show the students various ways of finding those rules, because there are various ways to use the source that are useful in different instances. It was also important to me to let students pick their own search terms, though I suggested a few when I asked them to start their searching (I suggested book, article, video).

Having students select their own search terms and then having some unsuccessful searches was a useful learning activity, and one that worked fairly well. It may have been more successful in a face-to-face environment with students working in groups and comparing results more quickly and visually, but it worked fairly well in this situation. Hopefully no one was too

frustrated when they searched for “articles” and got 200+ results. I was able to use the students’ searches (failed and successful) to introduce them to better ways of searching.

After my teaching demonstration was over, some students suggested that it may have been more useful to show the basic layout of the website, with the table of contents and quick guide, and *then* do a test search to see how it would work. As the instructor, I liked having students immediately do a search without much introduction to the site because they were immediately engaging with the source rather than standing back and observing it.

Because I wanted to build on what students already knew about the *Chicago Manual of Style*, I decided to start the demonstration by asking who had used the manual before and for what purpose they had used it. In a face-to-face setting, this would have been quick and easy. I would have asked if students had used the manual online, a few would raise their hands; I would ask if any had used the manual in print and a few more would raise their hands; I would ask what they had used it for and people would respond quickly and verbally. It probably would take about one minute. I knew that this would take longer in the online environment, but I had no idea that it would take as long as it did. I had allotted one minute for these questions and answers and it took nearly three minutes. Although this was a nice, active way to begin the demonstration, it also created a lot of silent time right at the beginning, while I asked questions and then waited for answers. I felt a little bit uncomfortable with the silence, but forced myself to wait for the responses. I’m always impressed with instructors who give appropriate wait-time after asking questions, because I know that it’s difficult to wait quietly for a response (though I didn’t know until last week how difficult it would be in an online class where there’s no verbal *or* visual response for a few minutes).

One of my strengths as a teacher that helped me in this demonstration is that I’m good at responding to students’ questions and comments. This is why I like leading discussions and why I started the teaching demonstration with questions and answers. I value constructivist learning

practices and think it's important to take time for students to process information before quickly moving on: I tend to value "process" over "product." In this particular teaching experience, that strength may have also been a weakness, as I spent perhaps too much time on asking students about their previous use of the manual. Another strength that helped me in this demonstration is that I'm a very organized teacher; in this case I had prepared a helpful handout that will hopefully answer students' future questions about using the *Chicago Manual of Style.*

The most useful thing I learned in this exercise was that *delivery method matters*. The demonstration that I planned was based on my learning preferences and my teaching experience (all in face-to-face classes), and although I took into consideration my various experiences in LEEP classes, the presentation still was probably better suited to a face-to-face class than an online class. Overall, the demonstration went well and I feel confident that many students learned something new about how to use the *Chicago Manual of Style*, but I also feel confident that the presentation would have been better if we had all been in the same room. In my previous LEEP classes, the majority of the time has been spent in lecture and small-group discussion and now I know why: it's time-consuming to conduct a discussion or a question-and-answer session in this format. I have greater admiration now for instructors who do lead discussions in LEEP classes. Now that I've had this brief online teaching experience I recognize some of the challenges involved in integrating active learning in the online classroom.