

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – Sample 1

My general teaching focus at university is to promote learning by engaging students in their learning environment, promoting higher order thinking skills and respecting their opinions and backgrounds.

I developed my respect for education and passion for teaching at a very early age in my life. My mother, an academic, planted the commitment to lifelong learning. My father, a military veteran, nourished this commitment with a sense of responsibility and respect to others.

I began to teach at an early age as I was entering my undergraduate studies in the Faculty of Engineering. My teaching was related to the community with a focus on teaching young girls living in rural areas and villages the value of education. I prepared materials, organized day trips and overnight conventions. These opportunities were rarely available for kids and youth in these communities and if it was available it would be only for the boys. My teaching philosophy when I started was based on respecting my young students and providing methods and tools that could help them in being independent and thus able to make the right decisions in the future. As the years passed, I discovered that teaching and learning is a two-way process; the more I teach, prepare for my classes and engage with my students the more I learn.

As they grew my focus shifted to mentor volunteers and guide them through reviewing and enhancing their teaching practices to reach out to vulnerable girls in their community. The curriculum that I designed encouraged creative teaching approaches developed collaboratively with the new teachers. During the weekly classes, I emphasized the importance of team work and mutual respect. Through my passion about the subject, I was able to engage my students in an enjoyable learning experience. As a teacher, I learned from my students. I challenged them and focused on helping them how to learn.

I entered the workforce in higher education, and I continued to carry with me the commitment to better education and respect for my students' knowledge and experience. My teaching philosophy evolved, to include applying principles and theories that relate to adult learning and constructivism. The constructivist theory explains that learning happens by creating a meaning from experience and what the learner knows is based on his/her own experience (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). Furthermore, in adult learning theories, the learner is involved and takes responsibility of his/her learning process. The learners self-reflect, gather information, collaborate with others and are self-directed (Conlan, Grabowski & Smith, 2003). In recognizing how adult learners perceive education, I incorporated in my teaching case studies and real life examples. See example 5 in Appendix (B) for an in class activity based on a case study.

In my current work environment, my students are highly educated and professional adults and I became more of a facilitator. In this role, my goal is to help the learners to analyze, evaluate and critically reflect on their own experiences rather than simply transfer knowledge. To achieve this goal, I have designed activities that could facilitate their learning in both face-to-face and online environments. For example, I have developed a workshop on facilitating group work among students; the workshop includes a group activity in which participants share their own experiences with groups and provide recommendations to the participants. The outcomes of the workshop became a knowledge base for subsequent workshops and resources for participants who did not attend the workshop; see Appendix (B) for examples of the course outline including activities.

As a facilitator of the Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW), a peer based international certificate program that help educators in improving their instructional and presentation skills, I work closely with the participants to help them in articulating their own teaching goals. During the three-day intensive workshop, I work one-on-one with the participants to overcome their own challenges and fears and boost their confidence. Moreover, I provide a safe environment for the participants to exchange ideas and provide efficient and constructive feedback. I have redesigned the workshop to offer in a hybrid format. Through activities and resources participants interact with each other, with the facilitator and the content in engaging and effective ways - these are three import elements in promoting students engagement (Dashew & Lee, 2011). Appendix (B) provides the course outline. Participants found the online modules very engaging, well structured and very useful; see Appendix (C) for detailed evaluation data.

With my background in software programming, graduate studies in instructional design, technology and online learning, and experience in project management, I use technology as a means to facilitate my own learning. Through my learning networks, twitter and personal blog, I participate in open dialogue with experts in the technology field. Similarly in my teaching, I encourage my students to explore new tools that could help them effectively collaborate and present their work. For example, I offered a workshop on Google Drive, I was able to help participants to practice the use of the tool, answer their questions and promote self exploration. With a focus on higher order thinking skills, my teaching strategies promote students' critical thinking in self-directed and safe learning environments.

Another focus in my teaching is to I incorporate the Universal Design for Learning Principles (UDL) in my course outlines and teaching. The outlines provide clear expectations, objectives and list of related assignments; example 3 in Appendix (B) provides an example of a rubric to help students understand the expectations for the assignments and activities. I align the assessment with the course objectives and provide multiple means of representation for the contents, including audio, video and multimedia components which follow the recommendations of UDL principles. In addition, the courses include formative and summative evaluations and rubrics.

Through a clear understanding and application of adult learning theories, I believe that it is my role as an instructor, to provide learning solutions that could enhance the learners' learning experience. This could be done by using research based perspectives on how learners learn (Huett, Moller, Foshay, & Coleman, 2008) and present the findings to participants, share their expertise and collaboratively develop best practices that learners could use in their teaching. Additionally, it is my role to include all learners and help them in understanding their role and responsibility in the learning process. For example, I created tutorials to help them understand the various technology tool associated with the distance course; see example 4 in Appendix (B).

As I am currently developing an online course on how to teach in hybrid and online environments, my goal is to incorporate my experience in teaching adult learners, instructional design and technology expertise, in designing and teaching the course.

Finally, as I reflect on my teaching, I perceive teaching as an enjoyable and fulfilling experience that I would like to continue to share with my students. I hope my students will develop their own ways of learning, and reflect positively on their lives and the community.

References:

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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – Sample 2

Since joining Ryerson in 2010 I have had the opportunity to teach two graduate courses on learning and teaching in higher education, to graduate students interested in learning more about teaching. When I reflect upon the way in which I designed and now deliver these courses, it occurs to me that several of their components accurately reflect many of my beliefs and values about teaching (please see CILT 100 and CILT 105 course outlines).

The focus of the first class in the first course (which should speak to its importance) is active learning. Active learning¹ is an approach that recognizes the importance of student engagement. It requires that students participate in the learning process, using content as opposed to acquiring knowledge through didactic means. It is an approach that I try to embed in almost everything I do in the classroom. When discussing active learning, rather than delivering a lecture, I use a number of active learning activities and techniques to demonstrate the concept. These include ice-breaker activities, think-pair-share, large group discussions, problem-solving and games. I create an environment where the students are themselves engaged in the learning process, thus (hopefully) helping them realize the value of this technique.

The second class focuses on inclusivity in the classroom, a core belief in my approach to teaching. Ryerson University has an extremely diverse student body and this diversity is reflected in many ways. For me, the first step in creating an inclusive classroom is recognizing the diversity in our classrooms. Following a large group discussion on various types of prejudices, the students and I identify strategies to overcome these prejudices in the classroom. I find that in this context, a collaborative approach allows for students to become exposed to perspectives entirely different to their own.

Much of the way in which these courses are delivered, including the assessment, utilizes an inquiry-based approach² to learning. Briefly, inquiry-based learning involves presenting a scenario or problem to a student or group of students, and guiding the students to their answer through the encouragement of questions.

My approach to teaching is one that has evolved considerably since my first TA assignment, as a first year MSc student, in 2005. At that time, I felt that I was the expert and students were there to listen to what I had to tell them. I now realize that encouraging students to formulate their own questions, investigate their answers, build new understandings and communicate these understandings to others, fosters a deeper level of student engagement that I could ever have achieved by speaking “at” the students.

One of the best parts about teaching these courses is that they are entirely optional. The students who take these courses are there because they have chosen to be and because they want to learn. As a perennial student, I recognize the importance of life-long learning and I try to impart that to my students. We discuss information literacy, much of which is based upon a principle of life long learning and I encourage students to educate themselves in new ways whenever they can.

I myself often register for classes at Ryerson, not just for personal interest, but also because it this serves as a constant reminder of what it is like to be a student. (I am coming to the end of my third graduate degree, an MA in Public Policy and Administration). Sitting in those classes, I experience things that interest me, that I enjoy, that bore me and that frustrate me. All of these experiences can then be applied to my own teaching practice.

Related to this, I am keenly interested in developing myself professionally. In my role as Educational Developer I have completed the University Teaching Development Practicum (UTDP), become an Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) facilitator and will begin a Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA)-accredited educational development program next fall. I realize that my approach to teaching and my teaching practice will continue to evolve as my experience in teaching grows.

Finally, I have often been asked why I chose not to pursue a career in research, but instead chose teaching. The short answer is because I love working with students. I see myself as less of a teacher in the traditional sense, but more of a mentor or a guide. I try to get to know my students as best I can. From my own experience as a student, I know that something as simple as learning the students' names goes along way to setting the environment in the classroom. I recognize that my students are individuals each with their own interests, passions and beliefs and where possible, I will incorporate these interests.

I consider myself extremely lucky because every day I get to come to work and do what I love.

¹Cameron, B.J. (1999). Active Learning, Green Guide No. 2. Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: London, Ontario.

²Hudspith, B. & Jenkins, H. (2001). Teaching the Art of Inquiry, Green Guide No. 3. Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: London, Ontario.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – Sample 3

Though I didn't know it at the time, my teaching philosophy began to form when I took a leave from my education. Only in my music courses did I experience a creative learning environment and passionate teachers. A lack of this experience in other courses impelled me to leave high school without any plans of furthering my education. Five years later, I returned to school knowing the importance of an education and learning, in general, to carrying one forward in life. Fortunately at this stage of my education I encountered a mathematics teacher, among others, at a community college using teaching styles and techniques conducive to a learning environment that I carry with me today. If it were not for these teaching styles and techniques, I may not have furthered my education. As a consequence, I am intimately aware to the importance of effective teaching to disseminate knowledge and maintain interest among students. To do so, there are three primary aspects of this teaching environment that I believe to be critical.

First, the student-teacher relationship must be established. This relationship is based on mutual respect and the recognition of boundaries. Without an environment in which the student feels their role in the classroom is important, that student will not play an active role in the learning process. Similarly, the students must have respect for the teacher if they are to engage in the learning process. It is the responsibility of the teacher to establish this two-way relationship through acknowledgement of the students and creating a space for learning.

Second, the classroom environment itself needs to be appropriate for the teaching technique. Whether it is a lecture, a discussion group, or a computer lab, the students' attention needs to be focused in the appropriate direction. Lecture halls are not conducive to discussions and a seminar room is not appropriate for a lecture. In short, the learners need to be in a position to listen or to participate. If the space of learning is not optimal, the teacher may have to adapt the teaching technique to the space provided.

And third, the teacher needs to create an intellectually engaging environment, where material is not only taught, but questioned by those present. Abstract theory must be tied to the real world, a description of events must be related to the historical context, and political action placed within philosophy. An environment of critical thinking that has students confront, evaluate, assimilate, and synthesize new information in order to apply that information critically, practically, and effectively for decision-making and problem-solving develops the students' experience to be much more than the memorization of facts and figures that will be forgotten or superseded in today's ever-changing world. This type of environment will bring students into the learning process, rather than keeping them on the sidelines of knowledge.

My overall goal is to re-create the positive aspects of my return to the classroom that were so important to me, in order to develop students that not only recite memorized facts and figures, but have an understanding of the material taught and the process in which they came to learn that knowledge. Ultimately, through time, the environment I create with the students in the classroom will evolve as I learn from their experience.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – Sample 4

As a teacher of hospitality and tourism courses in a business school, I feel that student engagement is enhanced by particular teaching methods that best reach a diverse student population. It is my responsibility to create a learning environment that dynamically engages students in course topics. I believe that the best way to achieve such engagement is through passion, process, projects, and people.

Passion. At the heart of my teaching style is the passion to be a teacher. I take great pride in the opportunity to impart knowledge and shape lives. I use my energy and enthusiasm to engage students in the courses I am teaching. I achieve this through the use of verbal (tone, pitch and speed) and non-verbal (walking around, eye contact and body language) cues. I also frequently ask questions and use in-class activities to capture student interest. Common words from faculty course evaluations used to describe my teaching are enthusiasm and energetic.

Process. I believe it is important to be process oriented when teaching. In order to advance my understanding of the teaching process, I completed the Ryerson University Teaching Development Program during the 2012-13 academic year. From the program, I learned and applied process based principles such as active learning, storytelling, and a systematic approach to the delivery of content. Throughout the year I experimented using these principles by including the use of videos, organizing class debates, short think-pair-shares, and regular class activities. The students responded positively by including supportive comments about the interactivity in class evaluations. As part of process, I also use the course goals and align them with the activities or course assessments

Projects. I've learned that students learn best when they are engaged in opportunities or tasks that are similar to the work of professionals within their discipline. Wherever possible, I use my twenty years of professional experience to share stories that bring alive the content of the course. If appropriate for the topic and course, I also work with industry professionals to create student projects about actual business problems. Along with hosting industry professionals for a guest lecture, I will work with them to develop a problem or assignment for students to apply what they have learned. Recent companies that I've partnered with on industry projects for students include Cayman Island tourism board, Ontario Culinary Tourism Alliance, Fairmont Hotels and Global Dimension Capital Inc.

People. At the core of teaching is to understand that students are first people and second students. Recognizing this, I endeavour to create a classroom climate whereby students feel comfortable expressing themselves and where they see me as approachable. In order to achieve this I encourage students to ask questions in class, create topics to stimulate class discussion, and respect their point of view. Students do not learn in a single way and it is important to find ways to connect with all students at their own level. Frequent comments in my faculty course evaluations from students speak to me being approachable and friendly.

As I progress in my teaching career, I learn from each course that I teach, using student feedback to modify the course to create better learning opportunities. To demonstrate that I listen and learn from student feedback, I have communicated feedback from course surveys and communicated how that feedback has changed the course content or my delivery of the course. I remember the first time I did this with a course, on the next course survey I received comments like "taken comments from last year and improved on his course" and "the prof valued the student feedback from HTM402". The students appreciated learning how I used feedback to improve the course and more importantly I think they felt I cared about their success.

Within three to five years it is my goal to develop a new course based on my research related to social media and the use of data to gain customer insights.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – Sample 5

My teaching vision is founded on two core teaching philosophies: that learning has to be experienced and that in teaching we should reach out to the individual student.

First Philosophy: Learning Has to Be Experienced. The professor-driven deductive learning approach of memorizing rules should be complemented with a student-driven inductive approach of determining intuitive understanding through experience. The inductive approach is more natural and typically leads to a deeper, more thorough understanding of theory – it is also in stark contrast to the artificial deductive approach we experience so often in school. The clearest example is how three-year-olds become expert iPhone users in minutes, through experience and not by reading the user manual.

This leads me to my first core teaching philosophy: I believe that most students learn better through experience and that the traditional deductive learning approach can be complemented with an inductive / experiential approach. To achieve this, I have provided an environment for students to interact with me, their classmates and equipment. We can never teach students everything they need to know, but we can instill in them the curiosity and the tools to learn within this environment and for the rest of their engineering careers. For example, my “Movie Monday” initiative invigorated students and jump-started discussions during early-morning Monday classes through short but entertaining engineering and science videos. But by far one of my favourite innovations was “Demo Fridays” in which I would bring hands-on demonstrations to class that reinforced key theory and concepts from previous class discussions.

The inductive approach to teaching requires students to immerse themselves interactively with the material, whether it is in a hands-on lab or a seminar discussion. Activities need to be shaped to fit students’ existing cognitive models if they are to be most effective, as well. I have implemented the following teaching methods and activities which support my inductive teaching philosophy:

Hands-on, Inductive Labs: I revamped the ELE 604 instrumentation labs with cutting-edge simulation tools, 3D printing and contemporary embedded systems hardware. All tools were selected to have a low entry threshold but which could grow with the student during the discovery and design stages of the course.

Sewable Electronics: I enabled first-year students in BME 100 with no electronics background to create electro-mechanical designs using easy-to-use tools.

Twitter Assignment: in BME 100 the students “tweeted” a clearly and concisely articulated precursor to their final project using a familiar medium.

Second Philosophy: Reach out to the Individual. When I was a student, the most meaningful lessons were those where I felt a unique connection to the material or the teacher. My second core teaching philosophy is that learning is a very individualized process. Because individual students come to the University with different learning styles and contexts, the “one-size-fits-all” approach to teaching is convenient but is ineffective for a large number of students. We can do better by thinking outside-the-box, maximizing the learning process and making it as individualized as possible by taking into account learning styles, cultural backgrounds and language abilities. My teaching style is adaptive to the individual student, as shown in these examples:

Individualized Projects: I engage students in BME 100 by helping them choose a project that resonates with them from a list of over one hundred topics. Further engagement is achieved through a variety of assessment platforms, including oral presentations, visual posters and hands-on demonstrations.

Enabling Students to go Further: In my Human Computer Interaction course the Architectural Science students were able to design interactive mechatronic projects because I found resources that were easy to learn, but scalable to match their vision for what they wanted to accomplish.

Choice of Exam Questions: in ELE 604 attempts to mitigate factors (e.g. language fluency, cultural background) that might otherwise unfairly disadvantage a student.

Optional Bonus Objectives: in the ELE 604 labs encourages students with more advanced backgrounds or who are inclined to “go-the-extra-mile” in design of system features or performance.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – Sample 6

Throughout my academic career, I have explored subjects that span the humanities and the sciences. From my research on how Victorian stage effects existed at the intersection of magic, theatre, and science, I found that seemingly divergent disciplines have much to offer one another—and that all too often, this type of collaboration is made impossible when students of one field find another dull or impenetrable. As an instructor, it is my role to frame material in an engaging, clear, and conceptually accessible fashion. This permits students to develop the communication skills, the critical thinking habits, and the openness to new thoughts that will allow the fruitful exchange and amelioration of ideas.

My careful approach to preparing engineering, business, and science students for their first university written compositions demonstrates my emphasis on translating concepts across academic fields. For example, although writing instruction was not part of the course material in “Technology and Prosperity” (Fall 2011), I knew that the assigned essays and reports would be daunting for some students, especially as many spoke English as a second or third language. As well as providing detailed feedback on the grammar, construction, and content of early assignments and dedicating tutorial time to learning how to make a clear argument, I identified and explained standards that are often taken for granted in the humanities, such as the difficulty of obtaining above 80%; the importance of gender-neutral language; and the importance of credible sources. I also made sure to introduce key theoretical concepts in easily accessible ways that related to the students’ everyday experiences (see Appendix, p. 53 [refers to sample lesson plan]).

To help students develop skills they may not have used in the past, I involve them in the learning process with participatory exercises and conceptual framing that relates new ideas to aspects of their current lives. For instance, in professional communication workshops, I led discussions applying concepts from professional communication theory to students’ daily lives, including everyday social interactions and popular media examples. Research shows that these and other active-learning tasks (that is, tasks requiring student contributions to the lesson) improve student retention of information and increase students’ confidence in their ability (Cherney 2008). As I learn more about active learning, I integrate non-traditional workshop activities, such as role-playing exercises, games, debates, and scavenger hunts, coupled with think-pair-share debriefings, to interest the students and demystify the unfamiliar subjects. For example, my negative message role-playing exercise (see Appendix, p. 52) not only engages students but also sweeps up classroom visitors (see p. 47-49 [refers to very positive teaching evaluation from RFA evaluator]). As my teaching evaluations show through praise for engaging lectures (see p. 51 [refers to representative student comments from evaluation forms]) and ratings higher than the departmental average (see p.21 [refers to Ryerson evaluation statistics]), my approaches engage students from a variety of academic backgrounds.

My third pedagogical focus is establishing the classroom as a safe environment in which students of all cultural and personal backgrounds feel comfortable contributing. Making sure students feel included in the classroom community is key to helping them learn (Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia 2004). Ryerson has “one of the most diverse student bodies in the world” (Ryerson website), and to foster this atmosphere, I set an example of respectful tone by using inclusive language. In discussion, I guide students through reformulating their thoughts to convey their ideas more clearly to their classmates during discussions, and I make it a point to learn all their names so all students know I notice them. A safe classroom environment lays the groundwork for students to become actively engaged in learning subjects outside their previous academic experience, enabling them to achieve my pedagogical aim and expand their intellectual horizons in both scholarly and business environments.

Concentrating on translation of concepts, active learning, and inclusive teaching has helped me to create an effective learning environment for my students. As I continue to develop my teaching skills to build upon this groundwork, through opportunities offered both by Ryerson University and by external courses, I look forward to helping my students excel in their academic and professional lives.

References

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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – Sample 7 (Ryerson)

I consider myself first and foremost a teacher. I see teaching as both a privilege and a colossal responsibility. Teaching is the profession that has enormous potential to influence many lives and to participate in shaping our future generations. I truly believe that my own teachers strongly influenced my choice of profession and thus, the entire course of my life. I view my role as an educator dedicated to help my students achieve their academic goals, become life-long learners and reach their maximum potential.

As far as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the natural world around me. My parents often recollected that weekend after weekend I asked them to take me to the local Natural History Museum. I was fortunate to have very knowledgeable and dedicated teachers who maintained and nourished my interest in sciences all the way through the years of middle and high school, and later through the university. Today, I try to share my fascination of physics with my own students. Teaching physics brings me the enormous personal satisfaction of giving back what I was so lucky to have received as a student many years ago.

Challenges in Science Teaching and the Role of Class Engagement

Generally, there is a wide gap between what we teach and what the students actually learn in our classes. Knowledge does not become truly functional until the student "appropriates" it. Although traditional lectures remain an important part of university teaching, a bulk of research on students' learning demonstrated that the students learn more effectively when they construct their own understanding through the combination of guided enquiry-based activities. One of my most important roles as an educator is to create an environment where the students are encouraged to formulate their own questions, solve problems, perform experiments and look for their own answers in a safe and inclusive environment. The steadily growing confidence in the students' ability to accumulate the knowledge is the best motivator in their future studies.

The university landscape has changed dramatically over the last three decades. Unlike in the past, when the majority of students taking physics classes were either physics or engineering majors taught in small traditional lecture classes, today's large physics classes also include students in the life sciences. In addition, today's physics classes for engineering programs have expanded dramatically. Therefore, the quality of physics teaching today affects a much wider population than ever before. Effective teaching-learning is unlikely to happen in a passive and disinterested class. Guided enquiry is the approach I strive to use in all aspects of my teaching. I always stress that studying physics offers unparalleled opportunities to develop such transferable skills as efficient problem-solving, critical thinking and logical reasoning. I believe that physics offers excellent tools to expose our students to the process of scientific thinking and to let them experience the process of scientific discovery. I aim to bring students closer to this goal by relating to the students the relevance of everyday experiences.

I believe that class engagement can be greatly enhanced by the use of modern educational technologies, whenever appropriate. It is also crucial for my presentations to include live in-class demonstrations.

When live experiments are not possible, I make use of video-analysis tools and computer simulations.

Every student learns differently and, unfortunately, physics is perceived by many as a difficult subject. In my classes, I encourage a small-group collaborative environment and I try to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and inclusiveness in which students with different learning styles and from different backgrounds feel comfortable.

The Impact of Science Education Research

My latest research interests grew from and are closely related to my teaching. My research findings are fully integrated into my teaching. A large part of my efforts have been directed at looking for new tools and methods of teaching physics, implementing them in the classroom and evaluating the outcomes. Over the years I incorporated into my own teaching interactive lecture demonstrations, peer training and collaborative small-group work. My current efforts focus on the use of advanced technologies such as clickers, video-based motion analysis, real-time data acquisition and analysis tools, on-line tutoring and homework systems, educational applets and computer simulations, and , most recently, the use of tablet PCs. All these tools are invaluable in supporting enquiry-based and activity-based learning. I develop, test and implement new teaching methods using these tools, and study their impact on students' learning outcomes, motivation and attitudes towards science.

The high school physics experience has a crucial impact on students' attitude towards science, as well as on the learning outcomes in introductory physics courses. Improving the students' success rate by facilitating the transition from high school to university is a pressing issue for a majority of Ontario Universities. This is why at Ryerson I initiated an outreach program to the community of high school physics teachers and volunteered to collaborate with representatives of the Toronto District School Board.

I believe in the need for on-going professional development. As educators we have a duty to share our findings with our colleagues. I am always ready to share my experience in using educational technologies and interactive pedagogies with my colleagues at Ryerson and beyond. This is why I became involved with professional organizations, whose mandate is to improve physics education and to advance the professional development of physics faculty at all levels. Currently, I serve as a Chair of the Division of Physics Education of the Canadian Association of Physicists; I am a Member of the Committee on International Physics Education of the American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT), an Ontario Section Representative to AAPT, and a member of the executive board of the Ontario Association of Physics Teachers. Over the last several years I delivered numerous contributed and invited talks and taught several workshops at local, national and international conferences, and professional society meetings. I believe that while we teach, we also learn from our students. I always seek informal feedback from my students, and I am always open to their suggestions. I view each new teaching assignment as a challenge and an opportunity to learn more about teaching itself and about my students. Last but not the least, students endowed with a life-long thrust of curiosity and learning will be competitive and successful in their endeavors of choice. In order to transform our students into life-long learners we, as educators, must lead by example by being proactive and always strive for our own self-improvement.

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Bloom

In a teacher training session I once attended, the instructor asked us to name a personal metaphor for teaching. Were we sculptors, carving and polishing young minds, or maybe gardeners, nurturing growth and weeding out poor results? This was easy. Within 10 seconds, I knew: I was the head spelunker, a cave explorer who guides students through the unknown and unseen. Sometimes leading, sometimes stumbling behind, I shine the flashlight on the secrets of an undiscovered world. I may not have every answer, but I know how and where to look. My mission is to show students that their ability to succeed has been there all along, if only they just find it.

Although that analogy was more apt when I started as a CUPE instructor, the metaphor still captures my central philosophy as a teacher. For me, teaching helps students discover and develop what they already possess - skills and abilities that will make them careful researchers, challenging analysts, informed citizens, critical thinkers and inspired journalists. I believe that this attitude explains the strong rapport that I enjoy with students. Although I remain final arbiter, they know that I respect their ideas and have confidence in their ability to become better thinkers, editors and writers. The School of Journalism's -and FCAD's - commitment to studio education has reinforced my belief that learning is discovery and has assisted my transition from journalist to professor. In my first year of teaching, I acted as a coach in the hands-on practice of reporting news, a 'sort-of' supervisor who guided students through challenges that I myself had faced working in newsrooms. I was lucky: my first class was easygoing, talkative and cohesive. A bit too dazzled by my professional background, they were forgiving of my inexperience as a teacher and ranked me as enthusiastic (1.1), responsive (1.1), respectful (1.2) and effective (1.3).

The next year, I realized how much I had to learn. My reporting class was a dispirited group. My teaching load had tripled and included copy editing, a subject that requires logistical finesse from the teacher and a huge range of disparate skills for students to master. (Copy editors do everything from rewriting lengthy articles to writing headlines to designing pages.) My stand-up comedy routine was not going to suffice. I took advantage of every session I could attend offered by LTO and took to heart every suggestion made in my teaching assessments. However, the turning point occurred when I read *7 Kinds of Smart*, a layperson's synopsis of Howard Gardner's theories on learning. It was a revelation, a shimmering treasure in the caves.

Gardner organizes modes of thinking and learning into categories that isolate and define their components. Auditory learners acquire knowledge primarily by listening and talking, for example, more so than, say, visual learners, who prefer to see information. Gardner does not prescribe rigid rules but instead establishes a paradigm for thinking about and experimenting with pedagogy. Most people possess a range of learning styles and preferences and, so, most classes benefit from a combination of auditory, visual, kinesthetic and other approaches. To me, Gardner's brilliance is his respect for every type of learning and his enthusiasm for harnessing them.

I applied these lessons immediately and, I think, effectively, from the minutiae of course management to the explanation of overarching concepts. I realized, for example, that no matter how often I might give an instruction orally, visual learners simply had to have it written down. I began to write more on the board, prepared more handouts, drew pictures to explain abstractions, played music, had them act out roles. Morale among the discouraged writers rose as their confusion evaporated.

In copy editing, I used techniques adapted from *7 Kinds* to build confidence among students intimidated by the visual and math skills needed for layout and design. In one playful, 5-minute exercise, for example, I ask students

to draw a map of the world from memory. The results are instructive and democratic in their variety, from perfect but wordless maps tracing every shoreline to schematic blobs with highly-detailed labels. What an effective (and visual) demonstration of how each brain works differently and yet also how each mind offers its own style and substance.

My exploration continued when I did specialized training in university teaching through the Poynter Fellowship at Indiana University. There were hundreds of ideas on offer about course management, presentation, instruction and assessment. Importantly for me, there was also an overview of pedagogical theory that has informed my thinking since. Yet, amid all the information available, the most important idea I gained was that I should expect more from students. Or, to put this in terms of Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of abstraction, although students may know, understand and apply knowledge, we must also inspire them to analyze, synthesize and evaluate as well.

In FCAD, technique always matters but students must go beyond process, to recognize patterns in media and in public debate, to synthesize information and create new work from old formats, to evaluate ideas and theories about journalism. With journalism's very existence at risk in 2010, this is more important than ever. In Bloom, I found a means by which I could inspire students to move up the ladder of abstraction. How rewarding those higher expectations became when I taught a group two courses, for a total of 10 hours together every week. We sped through the essentials and moved to independent inquiry that students loved -although it was many more hours of homework. My teaching has also been shaped by my time as a part-time student at University of Toronto. (I was required as a condition of tenure to obtain an MA, which I did in June, 2004.) Again, the insights ranged from the micro to the macro. I learned how often a class needs a coffee break and how clever it is to put course outlines on coloured paper. (Students can find them.) But I also realized how thrilling it was to be in a class where I was expected to soar, where ideas and ideas about ideas were spread out on the horizon. I wanted that for my students, too, and have tried to incorporate the approaches I learned at grad school to achieve moments of awe and possibility. Is it time to talk about structuring an argument in a newspaper editorial? Let's look at Aristotle's rules of rhetoric. Shall we discuss opening sentences? Let's look at Tolstoy or Austen or Vonnegut.

Teaching for me is a journey, trite as that may sound. Every year I learn something new. Every year there are new paths to explore and new information to discover. I believe I have transmitted that habit of inquiry and exploration among my students. I believe that my approach is in complete alignment with the goals of FCAD and the university. I hope you will agree.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – Sample 9 (Ryerson)

I believe that teaching is an equal partnership between instructor and learner and a process of joint discovery, one which works best when both parties make firm commitments for their own roles and have clear expectations of each other. I typically begin new courses by making explicit this social contract between me and my students using some variant of the following to provoke discussion:

I will

- Provide the opportunity to learn
- Respect your investment of time and money
- Deliver value added content in every class

You will

- Contribute to your own learning outcome
- Respect my investment of time and effort
- Prepare adequately for every class

Because I view education as this equal partnership, I do not subscribe to a "consumer" model of education. I have expectations of students and hold them accountable to meet them, and I encourage them to hold me equally accountable to meet my commitments to them.

I generally aim the level of my classes at the students who are slightly higher than average performance, to provide an attainable challenge for most. I provide additional supports, tutorials and extra materials to help the weaker students keep up with the class as a whole. I also take occasional bursts to dizzying heights to provide challenges for the top students and inspire the average students to give them some glimpse of how far the subject matter goes, and some intuitive sense of the joy of learning and exploring at the very frontiers of knowledge. Such outbursts are immediately followed by translations into plain terms and simple analogies to help the other students to see where we've been and to be encouraged, rather than discouraged by the distance covered. By making such translations into everyday terms, I help all students realize that there is nothing arcane or insurmountable about academic heights. Anyone can visit there if motivated to do the climbing.

I like to draw widely for the materials used in class, to connect with both popular culture and great academics of the past. My business courses frequently address important social issues of the day, quote relevant poetry, and discuss relevant Eastern and Western philosophical ideas ("There was nothing special about Socrates except his willingness to challenge what he actually knew and to face his own ignorance"). I also commonly draw inspiration from great scientists (e.g., Newton or Feynman) to encourage entrepreneurship students to try to examine the world more critically and more incisively than most people. Through this approach, I try to inspire these students to have the intellectual courage to act independently and decisively, and the skills and intellectual rigour to do so successfully. As I frequently tell students: "If you say you want to be an entrepreneur, most people will tell you you're crazy! And they just might be right. How would you know?"

But to challenge and stretch students to these heights, it is also essential to establish a safe and supportive environment, one where students know they have been equipped with all the necessary knowledge, skills, tools and attitudes, and where they know it is okay to experiment, to try yet fail, and to regroup and begin again. And so it is my challenge to strike a delicate balance between entreating them to reach higher than they think possible, and showing them how far they have already climbed! For example, in early classes I will strive to demystify the exclusionary jargon of specialist fields (such as venture capital financing) to help students develop confidence and a common sense approach to the underlying concepts. But in later classes I will slowly reintroduce the jargon by highlighting the important but subtle distinctions that are missed by common plain languages treatments of the subject. Students come away from the experience with an advanced understanding of the material, achieved without ever feeling swamped or lost.

In this manner I try to get all my students to approach the very edge of current knowledge of the entrepreneurship field, warts and all. I want them all to have the confidence to develop views and positions uniquely their own, with a confidence that is firmly grounded in informed opinions and in having done the wide ranging and careful thinking necessary to be sure they aren't "crazy" for wanting to pursue an entrepreneurial path.

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY – Sample 10 (Ryerson)

I conceive of my role as a facilitator of learning, one who, while possessing a greater degree of specific subject knowledge than my students, is continually arriving at new perspectives and insights as a result of an interactive classroom dynamic. I encourage discussion, debate, and questions even in high-enrollment classes, and strive to create an environment free of intimidation that respects all sincere contributions. Above all, I aim to move students away from the notion that they are consumers of a product, instead emphasizing student participation in, and responsibility for, the success of their course experience. I stress that this success requires good attendance, participation, meeting deadlines, and above all, intellectual rigour. I am not afraid to place high demands on my students, and while these demands sometimes elicit resistance, they have also been a consistent source of expressions of student gratitude at the conclusion of their course experience.

I also consider myself an advocate for the relevance and appeal of in-depth and critical interrogations of historical problems, not an easy task in an environment in which such endeavors are too often regarded as inherently dull and/or lacking specific career application. To accomplish this goal, I require that students make connections between past and present, whether in lectures, debates, presentations, or written assignments. I also strive to bring a great deal of energy and enthusiasm to the recounting of the historical narrative, to reveal historical personages not as mythological figures but complex and contradictory humans with failings as well as strengths, and where appropriate, to utilize humour as a means of maintaining interest. I believe such an orientation goes far in instilling in students the confidence to critically assess and contradict received accounts of the past. This effort to remain engaged with the latest debates within the discipline also requires that I update regularly the reading lists and lecture content, and make a concerted effort to introduce aspects of my own research and scholarship into the classroom.

Throughout my career as a teacher, I have had the good fortune of instructing students from a wide variety of cultural and socio-economic contexts, many of whom were first-generation university attendees. I consider myself privileged to be associated with the profession during a period which has witnessed a democratization of higher learning, and place special emphasis on ensuring that students who did not have access to the financial and pedagogical resources I enjoyed are provided an opportunity to succeed. Often this has meant building strong relationships with appropriate student resource centers (whether they provide academic, financial, or counseling services); at other times, student success requires an enhancement of self-confidence and a sense of belonging in what might be a new and impersonal environment. For this reason, I maintain an open door office policy, post all relevant course materials on continually-updated Blackboard websites, and respond in a timely and thorough manner to all e-mail inquiries. I also provide opportunities in class for students to announce meetings, events, and performances that they may be involved with, whether within or outside the university setting, and take time to attend some of these events myself. My aim is to strengthen connections among students, and between students and the wider community.

Each of my classes includes a seminar component, one which requires that students read and debate issues raised by primary and secondary historical documents. I find these sessions particularly important as class sizes grow, as the seminars allow me to get to know students in groups of roughly 20, and, given the diverse makeup of Ryerson's student body, to hear various perspectives on international issues from a global perspective. The subject of international relations and the multicultural composition of the Ryerson community are in this way something of a perfect fit, and make for a truly exciting and pedagogically-rewarding opportunity. Seminars are also vital in providing an opportunity for students who may possess stronger oral than written communication skills, as seminar participation constitutes a significant proportion of the final grade (15-20%). However, I am also aware that such sessions are new and sometimes intimidating for people without prior experience in the discipline, or who are by nature not as

outgoing as some of their classmates. I always encourage these students to talk to me about any issues they may have surrounding seminar participation, and to strategize about improving this aspect of their course experience. In the past, such strategizing has involved one-on-one sessions with particularly shy students in advance of the group session, so that they can enjoy an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned in what they consider to be a safer environment. In more than one instance, the confidence these one-on-one sessions has inspired has led previously silent students to begin to interact in the wider seminar session, a circumstance that brought considerable joy to student and professor alike.

Being a member of a non-degree, service department that draws students from a variety of disciplines provides special challenges, as students come to class with a disparate set of skills and knowledge (much of it bearing only a vague relationship to the discipline of history). This fact has led me to develop assignments that seek to draw on the specific knowledge base of particular, non-historical disciplines (with suggested topics created around the specific degree programmes identified by my RAMSS class list). This serves to give students greater confidence that they can say something of relevance in their essays, demonstrates the importance of historical thinking to all aspects of the human experience, and more often than not furnishes me with new and relevant information about the relationship of history to other disciplines. I have provided a sample assignment along these lines as part of this application package.

Finally, over the past two years I have liaised with Ryerson's Service Learning office to create community-based service opportunities for students enrolled in ACS 402, Introduction to Global Studies. I consider this experience one of the most rewarding of my professional career, as it demonstrates to participants the connections between international relations theory and practice, and provides students with an opportunity to confront some of the many challenges that are raised in class (global poverty, disease, war, etc.). Thus far we have partnered with child-focused development agency Plan Canada, as well as World University Service of Canada, an agency that brings university-aged residents of refugee camps to Canada so that they can complete their degrees. The community partners have reported high levels of satisfaction regarding the students' contribution, and the students have responded with unbridled enthusiasm to these projects, in some cases continuing their partnership with these agencies beyond the school term. I now consider Service Learning to be a permanent and vital component of ACS 402, and am considering ways to introduce SL into the other courses that I teach as well. To me, the program is the perfect embodiment of the Ryerson mission, and I and the student participants are grateful that the university has made room for such an opportunity to connect learning with practical and positive action.