

TEACHING SELF-EVALUATION

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1. Why I teach

I remember realising with great clarity during my final year of high school that my desire was to be a teacher. Upon reflection, I think this was a combination of having experienced great educators as well as those who took up the vocation without much enthusiasm. My parents, like so many of their generation, saw teaching as a dead-end career and encouraged me to follow my entrepreneurial passions and ambitions. This decision led to a 20-year detour as an entrepreneur – starting and selling multiple businesses and building a wealth of knowledge and first-hand experience that I still draw on today as part of my classroom experience. Walking into a business school classroom as a part-time lecturer for the first time 20 years ago felt like coming home; the distillation of my decades of lived business experience coupled with a deep desire to work on my craft set the foundation for my journey as an educator.

2. My conceptions of learning

For many years, I began each new class with the same quotation, wrongly attributed to Albert Einstein, telling students: “I can teach you nothing, but I can create opportunities for you to learn”. While the source of this quotation remains murky, I feel that the message to students was clear – learning is a voyage of discovery. To me, this is a constant reminder that effort was required from myself and my students; my job was to gather the collective intelligence and knowledge already in the room and carefully weave that into my teaching plan. I expected (and still expect) that students would take ownership of their learning, while I worked to build an environment conducive to learning. My exposure to pedagogical theory, educational sociology, and educational practice during my tenure at the University of Cape Town’s (UCT’s) Graduate School of Business,¹ and the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment,² along with my doctoral studies, provided me with the opportunity to bolster my intuitive sense of teaching and learning with a strong theoretical underpinning. I have been influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1978),³ Dewey (1938),⁴ Freire (1983),⁵ and Marton and Booth (1997),⁶ all of whom advocate a mode of teaching or learning that is constructivist, student-centric, and socially and contextually relevant. As my knowledge and understanding of entrepreneurship education developed, I found further conceptual support from Neck et al. (2014),⁷ whose work on “entrepreneurial worlds” has deeply influenced my teaching and learning journey.

My conception of learning, especially regarding my subject domain, could thus be stated as a mode of teaching and learning that places the students and their experiences, circumstances, and learning goals at the centre. My core function as an educator is to enhance students’ desire for discovery and knowledge acquisition and to provide the means, safety, and structure for this to occur, while facilitating the sense-making that happens as students look back on their lived experiences through the lens of new knowledge.

3. Facilitating student learning

I enter the class seeing each student as a mature, engaged, and motivated learner. While I know this may not always be the case, I believe that seeing students through this lens gives them permission to become that student. The preparation that students will have done prior to the class

¹ I conceptualised, raised funding, and founded the Raymond Ackerman Academy of Entrepreneurship Development at the UCT Graduate School of Business, pioneering a new market and pedagogical approach to teaching entrepreneurship to recent high school graduates. I was the founding director of this academy.

² I taught entrepreneurship and new venture planning across the following departments during my tenure at UCT: Construction Economics and Management, Mechanical Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Computer Science, Marine Biology, Microbiology, Social Development, and School of Music.

³ Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

⁴ Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Touchstone.

⁵ Freire, P. (1983). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). Continuum.

⁶ Marton, F., & Booth, S. (1997). *Learning and awareness*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

⁷ Neck, H. M., Greene, P. G., & Brush, C. G. (2014). *Teaching entrepreneurship: A practice-based approach*. Edward Elgar.

and the key concepts I plan to cover during the session are a backdrop to classroom engagement. I adopt a supportive and enquiring stance, rather than a confrontational and challenging one, encouraging students to voice their opinions, observations, concerns, and understanding on the learning material. I have found that this creates a high level of safety within the classroom, and thus brings in quieter voices from students who are often less inclined to actively participate. My primary task is to listen, support, and probe, and to then offer a way of bringing the theory, practice, and class discussion together into a framed and logical structure that acts as a set of simple guiding principles. This is especially relevant in the case method, where the case study becomes a centrepiece for discussion, and the need to extract general principles from the specificity of the case is the primary objective of the class discussion.

4. Teaching and learning goals

Each class I teach is structured around a clear lesson plan with learning goals for each session and activity or discussion. These are informed by the overall programme goals and I see my task as ensuring a high level of alignment between these overarching goals and the granular detail of my classroom engagement. At a more philosophical level, I set the goal for my students to expand their capacity to learn and their world view through each class engagement. Each activity, reading, case or discussion is an invitation for students to grow their understanding of our world, their world, and the possibilities inherent in continued growth, development, and knowledge acquisition. I also set myself the goal of having an open enquiring mind; the Japanese concept of *Shoshin* or the beginner's mind is what guides my engagement with students. I do not suggest I have nothing to contribute, but rather that I enter the class ready to learn and discover from the shared learning experience. Moreover, I want my students to engage in the learning journey with the eyes of an explorer. T.S. Eliot articulated this process perfectly in his poem "Little Gidding", saying "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time".⁸

5. Enacting my learning goals and beliefs

I enact my learning goals and beliefs in a number of ways. While these may be opaque to the student, they are clear to me through my session planning, delivery, and assignment grading.

- *Planning*: Each class session is guided by a detailed lesson plan that articulates the learning objectives for the session as well as a breakdown of each activity, class discussion, or individual or group task for the duration of the session. I construct every class with a view that the student is an open, willing, and ready participant who brings his/her full self to the class, rather than viewing students as empty vessels that need to be filled.
- *Delivery*: I treat the classroom as a crucible and enter this space with respect, humility, and a strong presence. In many ways, this is in contrast to my personality and nature. I am very much an introvert and find my energy renewed through silence and aloneness, but recognise the need to be present and extroverted in the classroom. I use the class discussion time to encourage students to find their voice and to draw on their experience and prior knowledge in formulating and developing their understanding of the concepts under discussion.
- *Theory*: I stand ready with theory and conceptual understanding to guide the discussion towards a fruitful conclusion, and work hard to include diverse views, voices, and experience in the room.
- *Assessment*: I believe that the most profound opportunities for development and growth come through engaging with and giving feedback to students during the evaluation and grading of assignments, tests, and exams. I seek to offer clear and unambiguous guidelines and rubrics for students, and to faithfully grade assignments against these standards. The feedback I offer is honest and considered, and I do this with a developmental lens. Student feedback is a careful blend of my deep entrepreneurial knowledge and experience with my appreciation for and affinity

⁸ Eliot, T. S. (1968). *Four quartets*. Mariner Books.

with the needs of postgraduate academic study. I look for and reward excellence, and am clear and direct with students who have failed to meet the required standard.

6. Evidence of student learning

I believe that students are enthusiastic knowledge seekers rather than reluctant credit seekers. With this in mind, I approach student evaluation and assessment through a combination of summative, formative, and ipsative assessment approaches. I have been inspired by the work of Benjamin Zander and his concept of “shining eyes”.⁹ While the formality of independent and moderated course assessment is required and necessary, I believe that evidence of student learning emerges in a myriad of ways. This includes the development of an enquiring mind – usually evident in class discussion and questioning, the movement from surface to deep learning – clearly seen in how a student reads, enquires, and engages with pre-reading and core texts, and the presence of “shining eyes”, something that emerges as a student believes, experiences, and feels that the learning process is personally relevant.

7. Creating an inclusive learning environment

My desire with my teaching and learning is to create inclusivity – however the teaching unfolds through a classroom experience. I hold myself to the standard of knowing that I create a safe and conducive environment in which each student feels able to participate and contribute. I create an inclusive environment by engaging with students as individuals – I work hard to learn students’ names and to be respectful and encouraging of their participation. I value and validate each contribution from a student – even if it is a view with which I disagree. I vary my classes with instructor-led discussion, paired work, buzz groups, and syndicate activity. I believe that this pedagogical variety stimulates engagement and allows students who learn in different ways to find an access point into the class and the learning materials. I come to class well-prepared with a clear plan, but also the flexibility to sense and respond to the class discussion and conversational direction. I am open and ready to reach the intended learning goals through multiple pathways.

I have a technique to encourage input and feedback from students during class sessions: at the end of my first session, I provide all students with a blank sheet of paper and invite them to give me feedback on what they want more/less of, or what should continue/stay the same. This feedback is anonymous and immediate, which means that I can affect course adjustments during the course or module. I have found this to be an extremely useful methodology to create an inclusive and mutually respectful learning environment, and to show my desire and willingness to learn, adapt, and meet student expectations.

8. Teaching self-reflection

My teaching is a meld of my deep and extensive knowledge and practice as an entrepreneur, my continued work and growth as an entrepreneurship scholar, and my continued practice as a teacher. I am deeply committed to perfecting my craft as an educator and to improving my practice and praxis. What follows below is as honest an appraisal as possible on my teaching practice. While I take heed of student evaluation and feedback, and work to integrate meaningful feedback into my course design and delivery, I hold student feedback at a distance. In some ways, student feedback can represent a “vanity metric”.¹⁰ While it is comforting to know that a subset of students has found the learning experience to be positive, I remain my greatest critic and hold myself to a standard beyond that of a positive student evaluation.

- *Course and curriculum design:* I believe that my course and curriculum design skills show extensive evidence of innovation. I have initiated seven new MBA electives related to entrepreneurship during my tenure at GIBS. Moreover, I have created curricula and course designs for the PDBA and MBA core courses, and the MBA Entrepreneurship Focus. My

⁹ Zander, R. S., & Zander, B. (2000). *The art of possibility*. Harvard Business School Press.

¹⁰ Vanity metrics are metrics that make you look good to others, but do not help you understand your own performance in a way that informs future strategies (<https://www.tableau.com/learn/articles/vanity-metrics>).

innovation regarding the MBA Entrepreneurship Focus has included redesigning the standard research report into a comprehensive and creative portfolio of evidence, as well as building dozens of hours of unique and original content parallel to the formal curriculum to support student learning and entrepreneurial activity. I was the first faculty member to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to travel by developing a virtual global module (to replace formal travel) in which we “visited” 10 countries in 10 days, exposing students to a range of entrepreneurs and those in the global entrepreneurial ecosystem. My course design is a careful blend of theory and practice; I am fascinated by the practicality of theory and while I can recognise good and bad theory/research, I weigh the theoretical inclusions in my courses against a practical yardstick, asking myself whether this will be useful for students. Because I focus on students learning *for* entrepreneurship rather than *about* entrepreneurship, I tend to pay less attention to research and theory that is not immediately available. Therefore, my curriculum and course design may provide students with less of a broad overview of the literature than some others. I am sensitised to students and their changing needs through a course or programme and am able to quickly adapt and change course as required. For instance, during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, I found my Entrepreneurship Focus group adrift in the online learning environment. I started a weekly Sharpen the Saw Zoom call,¹¹ which became an anchoring experience for the MBA group and acted as a developmental, motivational, and supportive learning experience through the year. Each week’s call featured a speaker, tool or skills development, book review or motivational experience. This proved to be a valuable experience for students and a necessary pivot in the course design.

- *Teaching and learning:* My teaching and learning practice is a space of natural confidence, ability, and excellence for me. Despite being an introvert, I enjoy the classroom environment and the co-creation of learning and knowledge. I have a good ability to “read the room” and understand where students are in the journey and what will add the greatest value in the moment. While I create and use a lesson plan for each class, I am adaptative in the moment. My classes are an energised space – I am unafraid of some chaos and unstructured engagement, and welcome a diversity of views and voices. I actively avoid the “sage on the stage” stance within the class – both physically (I tend to always stand to the side of the room) and intellectually by using active, open-ended Socratic questioning. My love for story and storytelling comes into each class as I try to weave a tapestry to connect the theory, case discussion, and student contributions. I have a deep well of experience, anecdotes, and domain knowledge that I bring into each discussion to add relevance and context. Notwithstanding my ability and confidence as a teacher, I believe that I could do more to challenge students to stretch their understanding and contributions. I say this because I am quick to validate each student’s contribution due to my desire to have all students contribute and participate. In spite of the importance of being a supportive facilitator, a more robust interrogation of each contribution would improve the teaching and learning experience.
- *Research supervision:* I find research supervision to be a rewarding experience and invest heavily in students who express a genuine desire to gain understanding of the research process. I build strong personal relationships with most of my research students and remain close to many after their studies. I see the supervision process at the doctoral level as helping students truly find their voice. In many ways, my work is about showing belief and trust in the students and helping them get out of their own way. My success, albeit with only two doctoral students thus far, is marked not by their successful graduation, but by their knowledge that the work is their own – that the dissertation is a result of their journey and effort.

I support and find support for students as they need it – a student, reflecting on my advice to seek editorial support for his work, wrote that this led him to “clearly communicate the research findings and contribution of my work”. My supervision work with MBA students is often developmental in nature and requires a more supportive stance. For many students, this is their first research endeavour and I take the supervision role seriously to create a safe, supportive,

¹¹ This name was drawn from Steven Covey’s work: Covey, S. R. (1992). *The seven habits of highly effective people*. Simon & Schuster.

and structured path from initial idea development to final submission. I make myself personally available to all my students – during and after office hours. Students have my mobile number and are encouraged to reach out as and when they need support. I meet students regularly – far in excess of the required number of meetings – and am responsive to their needs and their progress. Where I believe I could improve is to be more available to students who are not showing signs of being invested in the research process. I tend to overinvest in students who show strong signs of commitment to research and then be progressively less invested as students' interest, commitment, and progress wane. I am not suggesting that I stop providing supervision support for any of my students, but rather that I might triage my supervision work in a way that could exclude a struggling student who may manifest as one who is less involved or committed.

- *Evaluation and impact of learning:* I see my evaluation strategies as innovative and progressive. The common means of student evaluation for entrepreneurship courses are a business plan and investor pitch. I largely reject these out of hand; they are of little value in the world and are often prescribed because they are easy to grade. In fairness, I do require a business plan and investor pitch as part of the portfolio of work for the MBA Entrepreneurship focus. However, I see these as only one component of assessment. I also bring in a realistic assessment strategy by having students present work to genuine investors, rather than other students who are acting in the role of investor. Where appropriate, I include real engagement with start-up businesses as part of the assessment process. My Entrepreneurial Finance elective course includes a syndicate due diligence project conducted on behalf of angel investors with real start-up businesses; this brings realism and relevance to the assessment process. My area for development and growth concerning assessment and impact of learning is to take the final steps beyond the prescription of a business plan for my remaining courses. While this may be an expedient assessment tool, I remain to be convinced that it is an effective assessment of learning.

9. Final words

This teaching statement and self-reflection are, like my vocation as an educator, a work in progress. It is unlikely that my teaching and learning style will remain static and unwavering. Each opportunity to teach is for me an opportunity to learn. Each student assignment, class or course is a chance to experiment, observe, reflect, and adapt. This may be what attracts me so much to the Academy – the desire to remain a lifelong student and to view the class as an environment of privilege in which students have entrusted me with facilitating their learning, growth, and perspective. I choose to believe I can make a difference as a teacher, while at the same time balancing this conviction with the words of Oscar Wilde – “Nothing worth knowing can be taught”.