

Reflective Essay

I have learned a lot about myself as a teacher, both from getting experience in teaching as well as the certification process through TILT. I feel confident at this point that I am capable of successfully teaching college level courses. I have acquired many useful skills, many of which came directly from the TILT seminars. In working to develop my teaching abilities I have learned much about how we learn information, good and bad ways to present material, and techniques to help combat common teaching problems to name a few. This reflective essay is helping me verbalize and summarize what I have gotten out of the certification process.

Most surprising things I learned about myself

The most surprising thing I learned about myself is how far I have come in my teaching abilities since starting graduate school. I had no experience teaching beyond volunteer work with a non-profit astronomy group in educating primary school children. At first, I was uncomfortable speaking in front of even small groups. Now I am happy to speak in front of a large classroom. Since I am more comfortable in front of the classroom, I am better able to multitask while lecturing. I have learned to read my students' expressions to gauge comprehension. I am able to dynamically interact with my students in both formal lectures as well as less formal one-on-one interactions.

Another surprising aspect is that I am confident in the knowledge I have to convey to my students in the classes I have taught. As a student I was always impressed by the seemingly endless pool of knowledge my professors were able to draw on in lecture. Many times in teaching my students have had interesting and surprising questions about the content which I was able to answer, or at the very least speculate upon. A very exciting consequence of this is I have been able to incorporate these questions into following semesters as discussion points.

My teaching strengths

Based on what I wrote in putting together my ePortfolio, I think one of my teaching strengths will be to work techniques into the classroom that promote learning and retention of the material. I am fortunate that my discipline, cognitive psychology, has many direct implications for effective teaching. For example, it has been established that information will be better remembered when it is tested rather than just restudied. Therefore, it is important to not only inform students of optimal studying habits, but also build in opportunities for mini-tests of knowledge during class.

Directly relevant to my research is the distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge. It is critically important for students to explicitly learn the material so they will be able to link

other information back to it, which also enhances learning, but also to enable them to transfer the material beyond the context it was learned. An education would be almost worthless if the students were unable to take what they have learned beyond the final exam. One way to promote explicit knowledge of the material is to build in activities wherein students link the concepts to other concepts of the course or apply the concept to issues of the students' own interests.

A somewhat unique teaching strength I have is when a student does not understand a concept, I find it a fun challenge to get the right analogy or example that finally lets the student understand. As a student it brought me no end of frustration when I did not understand a concept and my instructor was only able to reiterate the same example given from the book, sometimes changing the phrasing. I have made it a personal mission to avoid this as much as I can in teaching. This is easier to handle in small classrooms, but is possible in larger classrooms as well. When I have a larger classroom, if a student is particularly struggling with a concept, I will either try to have them talk with me after class, or work in different examples in the following session.

What I learned through TILT

I feel I learned a lot of useful skills through the TILT workshops I attended. I have learned techniques I can implement to not only deal with plagiarism when it occurs, but to also help prevent it from occurring at all. I think the suggestion of giving students specific sources to incorporate into their assignments is good on many levels. For the students it helps reduce the perceived work they are having to put into the assignment as the job of finding sources is at least partially done for them. This also reduces the likelihood the less-inclined students will be able to find a ready-made paper on the internet. This workshop also taught me more about the legal processes underlying academic integrity issues, which can be daunting and somewhat inaccessible as a graduate student.

In other workshops I learned how to foster a more dynamic classroom. This is both from my performance as a teacher as well as working in more effective questioning of the students. I think what I have learned from these workshops will be very crucial with my view of teaching and these techniques will help keep the students more engaged and active in their learning.

Key documents in my ePortfolio

Directly linked from the home page of my ePortfolio are my CV, experiential learning form, teaching and research statements. From the starting page of my ePortfolio the components of the portfolio are accessible. I have included a video of a guest lecture I gave in the introductory psychology class this past semester. For teaching evaluations I have included a summary of my teaching evaluations from the undergraduates I have instructed as well as a written summary from Dr. Vicki Volbrecht who was kind enough to critique my teaching. My teaching materials contain lesson

plans, assignments, rubrics, and different tests I have either directly used in my teaching or would use if I had more control over the structure of the course. Finally are my workshop review forms with my summary of the workshop along with what I am taking away from the experience.