TEACHING PORTFOLIO
Subhash Appana, Senior Lecturer, SMPA

Introduction

I am humbled by the numerous nominations that have been submitted in appreciation and acknowledgement of my continued efforts to become an exemplary teacher. I view my job as a vocation because of the role that it plays in developing, building, enhancing, progressing and promoting the lives and aspirations of the very large numbers of students who come through university. The teacher/lecturer is socio-culturally placed in a little-understood (and often little-appreciated) key role within this developmental context. It is therefore, critical for teachers/lecturers to continuously strive to ensure that we maintain our relevance and continue to enrich the teaching-learning experience of our students. In this regard, I believe teaching needs to be student-centered, clearly grounded in the context and experiential for students to get the best from the courses covered. Here, I present my teaching portfolio based on the criteria outlined with supportive material where relevant.

Criterion 1: Approaches to teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn

By its very nature, the teaching profession places the teacher/lecturer in a position of trust and high expectation. Given the nature of students – working students - this means that not only do students expect to learn directly from the teacher/lecturer, but they also expect to be inspired, challenged, guided, assisted (literally looked after) and moreover, coaxed and pushed through the process should the need arise. I share here two approaches that I have used successfully in my efforts to excel as a teacher.

1. inspiring and motivating students through high-level communication, presentation and interpersonal skills

PDBM classes are scheduled from 17:00-20:00; the students come to class after a day of work and are usually either tired or distracted (to varying degrees) or both. It is therefore, critical to catch their attention at the outset and maintain it throughout the 2-2.5 hours that follow. This can be a daunting task. I make sure that I appear approachable, friendly, enthusiastic, focused and professional when I enter the lecture room. This show of “energy” tends to set the right tone for the 3 hours that follow. My person however, has to be augmented by a lecture that is professional, informative, challenging, entertaining, provocative, humorous, identifiable-with, etc. The following comments from students reflects this well:

1 Use of first person throughout this report is necessitated because of the required aim to present a personal portfolio to win the teaching excellence award – any interpretations vis-à-vis pomposity should be viewed in this regard.
• Subhash is a man of respect. He knew how to approach students on their different levels, cultural and situation. One great example is his simple approach which had a lot of respect of the fact that many of us are working.

• Corrected us and respected our privacy.

In other words, it has to be a lecture that can stand alone on its own, that gives you something of practical value and relevance, that provides you with frameworks for answers to problems that you might be having at work, that provides you indicators to better understand your own work and most importantly, that keeps you from taking a soft deserved snooze after work (in class). Let me explain how I manage to do this.

Slides – apart from your own professional appearance, it is very important that your slides\(^2\) are attractive, provocative and look professional. To this end, I ensure that my slides are meticulously prepared so that every slide has all the ingredients I insist on when students make their own presentations. These include: no typos (English errors, spelling errors, punctuation marks, etc.); font types/sizes are uniform; no unnecessary embellishments are used; only key points appear in order to ensure that the slides are uncluttered. In addition to this, there are 2 additional concerns: one, every slide has a heading and a body (\textit{this ensures that even if focus wanes, it can be easily returned to}); and two, no full sentences are used unless unavoidable (\textit{this ensures that students actually listen to what is being said}).

I have highlighted these seemingly “common” requirements on slides because I’ve noticed that it is no longer the norm to have error-free slides – I strive to ensure that my slides are error-free. In addition to this, I look for interesting illustrations of key concepts on the internet and use these in class. For example when developing a framework for Leadership, I use the following illustration:

\(^2\) There have been times when slides appearing on Moodle have had small errors, but every effort is made to ensure that what is used in class is as faultless as possible. This is particularly important because I enforce this when students make their own presentations as part of required assessments.
While explaining the contrast between these two approaches to leadership, I focus on famous leaders and show their photos while analyzing their leadership traits and styles. Some of the carefully selected leaders covered include the following:
I like your Christ,
I do not like your Christians.
Your Christians
are so unlike your Christ.

Mahatma Gandhi

I never lose.
I either win or learn.

Nelson Mandela
"For the political leader the religious doctrines and institutions of his people must always remain inviolable; or else he has no right to be in politics, but should become a reformer, if he has what it takes!"

― Adolf Hitler in Mein Kampf
When I talk about the backgrounds, history and legacy of these leaders, the class is rapt. Then I start explaining the quotations attributed to each and introduce slides with thought-provoking questions for the class. Eg. What can be learnt from each of the above leaders – one per group? The group discussions that follow clearly enables students to actively take control of their own learning on the topic of leadership. The fact that I’ve included Ratu Mara amongst the leaders chosen helps bring the concept closer to the students as they are better able to identify with this leader. They are also eager to learn more about him because he has not been part of any of their formal education curricula.

Content and Delivery – the slides often only attract attention, it is the content of the lecture that helps maintain this. To this end, my lectures use illustrative diagrams and photo images (as shown and discussed above). They also begin with relevant anecdotes or more involving experienced examples that are interspersed with humour. Some examples are included in the following section.

When teaching about TQM, I relay my personal experiences at Hino Motors, etc. – where I was attached to for 2 weeks - on how the assembly line operates and where the quality assurance systems come into play. This is interspersed with my own thoughts and interpretations prior to and after actually seeing how zero-defects is ensured. I talk about how a huge Hino truck was assembled in 7.2 minutes…. And that the target was to reduce that to 4 minutes as that was the assembly time for Toyota trucks at the time – an illustration of Hino Motors using Toyota’s assembly cycle time as a benchmark. Then I show them the Saturn Plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee
at this site [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNrfqHaEeYg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNrfqHaEeYg) and they are totally taken by the fact that Saturn has a cycle time of one minute! Finally, I explain how/why this is only possible because these plants use the TQM approach to management.

These types of anecdotes, examples and visuals (where possible) help set the foundation for movement to the more important parts of the lecture, are integral to understanding the lecture and also serve as points of reference throughout the lecture. I have noticed that students who have strayed away from the concept under discussion are more easily brought back with pointed references to the example used at the beginning. This is a technique that I have used to great effect given the context and the following comments from students clearly attest to this:

- Since I had decided to go back to school after a long time, his teaching/ lectures has motivated me to do more and to try my best.
- By sharing more practical and realistic experiences that led to his success in learning. That led to motivate most of us to achieve our first graduation course after so many years in service in our own organization.
- Subhash’s lecturer skills is outstanding and must be recognized by the University as one of the most effective lecturers that directly links theory into practice which I find to be a missing link towards theory and workplace practice.

2. encouraging student engagement through the enthusiasm shown for learning and teaching

I believe that a large part of my teaching success derives from the enthusiasm I show for teaching and learning such as in the example I outline here.

When teaching Ethics and Leadership, I use examples that are simple, humorous and easy to relate to. I used the example of a fireman who comes across a vehicle accident where his wife and best friend are about to die. He discovers on-the-spot that they’d been having an affair behind his back and is now faced with the dilemma of saving only one of them as that is his only option. The question: what would YOU do, got the class animated beyond expectation. From my end, the aim was to show how ethical dilemmas actually leave us with a “do and you’re doomed; don’t and you’re doomed” situation. Student feedback again highlights this as seen below.

- One of the most inspirational lecturer. He has good teaching skills which helps students to understand concepts. Very much well-versed with whatever he is teaching.
- Doctor Subhash explained it in a very simple way with real examples you could relate with. At the same time he allowed room for students to think for themselves and in my opinion that was necessary to equip leaders for the professional world.
- By thorough explanation with a joke brainstorming whatever topics his talking about. A lot of examples and experience talk.

**Criterion 2: Development of curricula and resources that reflect a command of the field**

It is my firm belief that one has to have a special passion and commitment to become (and maintain being) a good teacher. This however, cannot replace experience through which comes a highly useful awareness and appreciation of the unique circumstances of students in the USP region. I
started my studies at USP via the distance mode – this first-hand experience with distance learning has influenced me deeply in my orientation towards my students. I have learnt that students come to a course with a certain level of passion and interest. It is a key challenge to ensure that you identify that interest, tap into it in order to design key learnings into the topic covered and maintain the passion by encouraging students to not only listen and learn from your own teachings and experiences, but to share their own experiences and knowledge. The following feedback from students captures this well:

- Since I had decided to go back to school after a long time, his teaching/ lectures has motivated me to do more and to try my best.
- He is a very good lecturer and he understand situation and problems of what we have been learning which motive me a lot.
- He was easy to relate to
- One of the most inspirational lecturer. He has good teaching skills which helps students to understand concepts. Very much well-versed with whatever he is teaching.

I have also been involved in teaching and learning since 1986 when I was engaged as a Student-Tutor by both the Department of Management and the Department of Economics (USP) at the time. Since then, I have studied and worked in Japan, New Zealand and Australia in addition to the USP region. My experiences in these countries have clearly showed that simply teaching by delivering lectures (supplemented with similarly guided tutorials) is no longer as effective as creating learning environments and designing learning activities that provide students with different instructional techniques to progress incrementally towards a stronger understanding of the concepts and expected learnings. This ultimately leads to greater independence in the learning process albeit under close supervision or course facilitators. The following comments from students highlight how they view me in terms of subject area expertise:

- Subhash gave a lot of his own professional examples from his own depth of research as well as real context examples that allowed us to relate to our professional environment, both locally and on a global level.

The insights and learnings from these experiences came in handy when I provided leadership to the PDBM programme from the outset. With my continued engagement with the programme, I have strived to continue to make improvements to the different courses that I teach by the inclusion of new/additional/better material as I come across them in my searches. I include here a case study that I wrote on strategic change in an organization some years back that is still very useful; a research paper that I wrote on ethics in education administration, a paper I wrote on the business environment for quality initiatives in Fiji and a number of other material that I have kept collecting whenever I’ve had time – all these have been aimed at improving the quality of our courses as well as piquing the interest of our students and making their studies more interesting, exciting and thought-provoking. I have continued to accumulate additional material in the resource bases dedicated to each of the courses I teach. They are as follows:

CEB61 Business Ethics and Leadership: Conference Paper - “Hand of Management” Case; Davina Murray NZ Case; Drug Report (ethics in journalism)
The first case highlights how the single-minded pursuit of profits can compromise standards at institutions of higher learning. The second, shows how civil servants can lose their professionalism when it comes to dealing with family members especially in the Pacific context. The third is a newspaper article that shows little concern for the damage it could cause to the child involved if his mother, who is centralized in the article as a Fijian drug courier caught in Malaysia, could be identified. The article virtually reveals her address without divulging her name! All these cases help highlight issues surrounding professional (and personal) ethics. When I move discussion to how human sentiments, natural inclinations and ethics create contradictions and dilemmas in human decision making, class participation becomes highly animated.

CEB62 Strategic Management and Risk Analysis: Asahi Super Dry Case; Sam Prince Zambrero Case; Demise of TV3 NZ Case

The Asahi case highlights how a relatively small beer-maker strategically outmaneuvered its 3 bigger competitors to become Japan’s number one brewer. When I relate that I was in Japan during the “dry wars” and how I actually interviewed the team leader of the Asahi Super Dry, the class is spellbound. Then I tell them how I was shown a video in response to my question: why was Asahi so sure that the beer would succeed? In that video, I saw myself tasting the beer at Umeda Mall (Osaka) in early 1987 as part of their “market testing” exercise. – my research on the beer (and this video viewing) was conducted 8 years later in 1995! It is these types of twists that generate the best class participation.

CEB63 Total Quality and Change Management: Conference Paper - Business Environment for Quality Initiatives in Fiji; Assessing Government Services: an evolutionary process (a provocative re-look at service quality and its evaluation)

A major shortcoming in classes (from my own experiences) is that concepts are taught with very little (or totally without) contextualization. This conference paper highlights why organizations in Fiji don’t seem to prioritize customer-focus in their operations. Tremendous discussions ensue in class on each of the points highlighted. Ultimately, it is the context that gravitates to the center of discussions and students personal knowledge, expertise and experiences enhance and enrich learning throughout the class. This is clearly an example of how co-construction occurs in teaching and learning.

CEB64 Business Communication: Communication Secrets of Great Leaders; John Key vs Winston Peters (witty exchange in parliament); Stanford Rape Victim Statement (how to write for impact)

The witty parliamentary exchange between NZ PM John Key and veteran Winston Peters does not only highlight enterprising use of words, but shows how 2 political rivals can deride each other while maintaining mutual respect. The lessons from this for Fiji’s parliament make for very interesting class discussions that could deteriorate if not moderated right by me as coordinator. Moderation on issues that have latent partisan origins and that could easily escalate into full-fledged argument calls for very careful choice of words, reason and delicate conclusions.
On the other hand, the impact statement clearly illustrates how to write for impact. It serves as a highly useful guide for students. Firstly, the case involves rape of a student on the campus of a famous university in the US. This instantly catches student interest. Then it holds interest because it is full of societal values that are different. Finally the students want to know the outcome of the trial. However, in order to get to the verdict we need to read through the victim impact statement. This ensures that everyone reads the statement and I then highlight how one writes for impact. When I follow this up with an exercise on writing 2 sentences and improving it successively, it makes for a most interesting experience on how English writing can be improved for impact.

Criterion 3: Approaches to assessment and feedback that foster independent learning

It is my firm belief that assessments must be linked to both the theoretical/conceptual matter covered as well as the actual practicalities that students would need to link them to. Here, the content and design of assessments and the nature of feedback play a key role. Each of the assessments in my courses is designed taking into account these 2 key concerns - theoretical/conceptual matter covered as well as the actual practicalities that students would need to link them to. I provide one example from each of my 4 courses here:

CEB61: Identify a leader and discuss why you consider him/her to be a leader - give the background of the person and what s/he has done to deserve to be called a leader. What is the legacy of the person and what are some leadership lessons to be learnt from him/her? You will again work in groups of 4-5 members.

This assessment calls for thorough research on a leader. The crux of the assessment falls on justifying why they consider their choice to be a leader. In the process, they learn not only what makes a leader, but also what a leader does and how s/he impacts his environment. This makes it much easier to explain and understand the different key theories of leadership that have to be covered in any course on leadership.

CEB62: Prepare a strategic plan for an organization of your choice. You will need to conduct a SWOT analysis, list the findings of your SWOT analysis and formulate strategies based on these. Each of these will need to be outlined clearly in your strategic plan. You will again work in groups of 4-5 members.

Here students conduct a thorough environmental analysis of an organization of their choice. They then use the findings of this analysis to formulate strategies that are linked to strategic objectives that they set themselves. A key aspect of the assessment is for students to justify each of their strategies in terms of feasibilities, costs, risks, etc. This assessment, thus, actually makes students go through the whole strategic management process in a mock exercise.

CEB63: Prepare a slide presentation on how you would implement TQM in a local organization of your choice. This will need to be as detailed as possible with clear steps outlined and justified. Note that you will use the Change Management framework for this exercise! You will again need to work in groups of 4-5 members.
This is again a group exercise that requires students to analyze an organization and propose how TQM could be implemented in it on a step-by-step basis. The challenge needs to be considered within a change management framework as introducing TQM in any organization essentially involves major change. All of the challenges, pitfalls, and obstacles need to be considered and proposals made on how to overcome them. Leadership, communication and strategic thinking are all involved in the process of introducing TQM. This exercise thus, attempts to see students linking their own knowledge, expertise and experiences, and prior learning from other courses (plus parallel learning from CEB64) into the challenges faced. This assessment (as well as the others outlined here) allows use of good practical examples that can be linked to their own workplace.

CEB64: Prepare a role play on conflict resolution using a scenario of your choice. You will again need to work in groups of 4-5 members.

This assessment focuses on the huge topic of conflict resolution. The course itself is on communication, but the assessment attempts to identify strategies on using communication to resolve conflicts. It pushes students towards thinking about communicating in strategic terms.

All of these assessments are continuous and geared to provide opportunities for students to learn from and improve in their ensuing assessment efforts. It is in this regard that feedback plays a critical role. I consider it imperative to provide meaningful feedback to students in a timely manner; meticulous and accurate record keeping is critical for this. The Moodle Marksheet helps greatly in allowing students to monitor their progress. Every effort is made to ensure that the Moodle Marksheet for my courses are up to date. General comments are provided over more than an hour after each set of assessments have been concluded. In addition to this, each assessment is evaluated and pointed feedback provided in person to students who wish for individualized feedback. This helps keep the students involved and attached throughout the semester. The following feedback appears to highlight this:

- By sharing own experiences and making practical lessons like group projects and research, group presentation and being an effective presenter. Mr. Appana shares his experiences most that make students understand more.
- He use positive stories and examples on assessments which helps me a lot in terms of understanding the objective of the course.

In providing feedback, I’m guided by a number of principles\(^3\) that help enhance students’ responsibility for, and control over, their own learning. Firstly, I outline and specify clearly what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards) for the course and the assessment involved. Feedback on assessments are focused on helping clarify this further. Secondly, I encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem. I’m very conscious of the fact that our students have not been to university and are coming back to formal learning after a long time. It is critical not to intimidate them and keep them focused on goals that are viewed as both interesting, of practical value and achievable. Thirdly, I actively encourage interaction and dialogue around learning (peer

---

and teacher-student). Most of the assessments for my courses are group based - this facilitates peer learning. When I provide feedback on these assessments, I actually sit with the group and discuss from my detailed notes on their presentations both as a group and as individuals. I also highlight my own experiences so that they can identify with what I’m proposing. The following comment seems to capture this:

- By sharing more practical and realistic experiences that led to his success in learning. That led to motivate most of us to achieve our first graduation course after so many years in service in our own organization.
- Subhash has always have a welcoming and excellent interpersonal approach which influence the positive liaison with students and comments on areas where improvement area needed and he takes time (patience) to address students in order for learning to take place.

Fourthly, I am guided by the principle that feedback should further facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning. I find this particularly useful when students disagree with my assessment as after I explain and they engage in peer assessment followed by discussions, the dispute, almost always, disappears. Fifthly, I attempt to support the development of learning communities among my students. This is done through my assessments and feedback processes as I justify my assessments, point out how to make further improvements and encourage them to continue working in groups as they work towards making those improvements. My main concerns in adopting these principles to help guide my assessment and feedback is appropriateness and usefulness of feedback plus the need to ultimately foster independent learning. This is captured in the following feedback from students:

- Doctor Subhash () allowed room for students to think for themselves and in my opinion that was necessary to equip leaders for the professional world.
- We had group work presentation and individual tests. This both encouraged a team orientated approach as well as an individual effort. We had to answer questions and did our own research around it and it was clear that after the exercise you learnt a lot more.

**Criterion 4: Respect and support for the development of students as individuals**

It is my firm belief that the dependency relationship between a lecturer and a student can be best addressed by viewing it as a joint-undertaking (joint-enterprise). The shared aim of this joint-undertaking is that the student receives the quality of education prescribed (and expected) and the teacher/lecturer ensures that the student goes through this process happily and enthusiastically. The following feedback reflects well how my students view me vis-à-vis respect and support for development of students:

- Treats every one with respect and support and gives good feedback.
- He is a very respectful person and he has shown it during our studies when he try to support us with our assignment.
- Interpersonal Skills and the ability to mutually relate subject matter without affecting and disrupting the student emotions and beliefs.
To this end, almost as a rule, there are 3 strategies that I adopt: Firstly, I use a variety of selected case studies (and readings) for my classes; secondly, I speak in the vernacular at appropriate times to both connect with and renew connection with students during class; and three, I use visuals and hyperlinks to access useful material from the internet. In addition to the above, here, I break down how I help students via a few key activities that help clearly highlight student/learner-focus in practice.

Queries – the fact that most PDBM students are either first-timers or those returning to after a long time USP clearly means that any and every query regarding the course or the program that it is associated with, would come to the facilitator. It is in anticipation of this that I spend considerable time and effort in familiarizing myself with the processes and requirements of students wanting to join the PDBM programme. After all, in order to be able to provide quality information, one needs to be fairly well informed in advance. This brings us to the issues of: response time and record keeping.

Response time – this is a key to not only attracting, but retaining and gaining repeat students. I have made a rule to respond to routine queries within 5 minutes of receipt. Other requests may take longer, but rarely do they go beyond 2 working days. For similar requests appearing repeatedly (like an MBA entry reference), I have prepared pro-forma templates that help avoid unnecessary delays. It needs to be emphasized that minimizing delays and speeding response times is closely linked to the quality and type of record keeping used.

Record keeping – for my courses, class lists are taken off the server in excel format and constant changes made keeping a close watch on the attendance register as well as the Moodle Marksheet. I pride myself on the fact that at any given time I can respond to any queries on my students within one minute! This calls for an effective and efficient virtual filing system that can be tapped at any time. Closely linked to record keeping is the need to provide timely and useful feedback to students.

Student Development – in addition to the subject content that is being taught in programmes like Pacific TAFE’s PDBM, there are various other issues and concerns that form part of the “professional” training that is expected. In this regard, aspects such as punctuality, timely communication, integrity, slide preparation, presentation skills, etc. are emphasized in my courses. I spend time and effort on each of these. Many have told me that this is the first time anyone has actually explained to them WHY these things are important. To me, this itself has been a revelation.

Criterion 5: Scholarly activities that have influenced and enhanced learning and teaching

I have been researching and publishing in the area of teaching and learning as a few of the articles submitted here would support this. I have also been a regular attendee at most of our research presentations and my input has been taken very well by both students and colleagues. Dean Patel has stated that I should “keep up the good work” in order to help our students improve the quality of their research. Students have begun to talk about: “Subhash will be there” – meaning that they have to make sure their presentations are near-excellent. What I’ve learned is that students need to be “pushed” to improve their slides/presentations. There is a tendency to circumvent the time-
learned tenet of paying “attention to detail”. This needs to be emphasized and enforced to improve the teaching and learning process.

In addition to this, I have completed a MOOC course on technology-enabled learning (certificate attached). This has opened up a whole new dimension in how I teach as I have now begun to access free open resources online. I have also begun to traverse between conducting lectures and letting students listen to some known expert in the subject area via pre-selected hyperlinks. This helps break the monotony, provides input from at least one other source on a key topic and encourages looking at the same issue from other perspectives. The discussions that follow from TEL input has been very encouraging as it leads to further thought and attempts to make linkages with other learnings from the same course or other courses.

Conclusion

I make no secret of the fact that I view my profession as a vocation – there is a transformational role that we play as teachers in the lives of the huge numbers of students who come through us. We need to ensure that we identify individual as well as collective needs of our students before adopting what we consider to be appropriate approaches to addressing the challenges of teaching and learning within that group. This has to be guided by key human as well as technical concerns. On the other hand, the assessment and feedback process needs to be guided by principles that facilitate engagement, further motivation and promote deeper learning while fostering independent learning in students. These are some of the key concerns that guide me in my chosen profession. I’d like to conclude by stating that my philosophy towards my profession is guided by a variation of the Japanese-mastered philosophy of customer-focus where customer focus is the starting point, key driver and result of any quality initiative. Here I’m driven in terms of learner/student focus – this is what guides decision-making in how I design and deliver my courses for Pacific TAFE.