

PGCAPHE



PG CERTIFICATE IN ACADEMIC PRACTICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION



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Portfolio URL

<https://mohamedraffa.com/pgcert/>

Introduction

My statement is a declaration of my reflections on how I approach teaching in HE, and have I done to change or reinforce my TLA in pedagogical practice.

The statement will follow the relevant academic reflective cycles that have been introduced during the M010DL PGCAPHE course and will attempt to follow Gibb's Reflective Cycle methodology. (Gibbs, (1988).)

The "Statement" will be a condensed summary of my reflective journey on learning/teaching experiences. In fact I would rather identify it as my "learning – to – teach" journey. That's the TEACHING-LEARNING-ASSESSMENT (TLA) process.

The statement will emphasize my overall "learning – teach" practice and what motivates my teaching methods. It will demonstrate how I developed, my teaching practice through critical reflections of external observations and feedback from students (learners) and peers. Reflections will also draw upon theoretical principles and practices in teaching and learning theories drawn upon from my research and training.



1- Description

Context and Roles Played:

I teach Law Degree (LLB) for undergraduates at CU London. It is an academic degree that qualifies successful candidates to train as Lawyers. I hold a PhD in Law and practice as International Dispute Resolution Lawyer. I am also an accredited International Arbitrator and Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (CIArb)

where I held the position of Director of Training and Education of the European Branch where I teach Arbitration Law for Post Graduates.

Practicing teaching to Post and Under Graduates enhances my TLA practice and supports my efforts for development as an Educator in Higher Education.

The running and managing of Modules for those two categories involved varied roles based upon quality of material, diversity of learners, transparency in teaching, and commitment of both learners and educators. Running the modules involved: (i) arranging and running Tutor-Student counselling sessions; (ii) Time-tabling and planning coordinated efforts to ensure that teaching principles and strategies are apt to the needs of all learners; (iii) Evaluation built upon learners' feedback, external observation and employability of successful candidates. These values constituted the framework I used to develop, self-assess and learn.

Those were also values that constituted part of the learning outcomes of the PGCAPHE course to ensure that teachers and learners collaborate in the classroom to foster the learning process. (Tomlinson, 1999)

In addition, I have participated in various co-lecturing in the School of Law at Cambridge University, University of East London and King's College. I arranged and took part in Higher Education research, workshops, seminars and conferences. I am the LLB Modules Leader for Years 1 & 2 for Years 2017/18 and 2018/19 at CU London and the Arbitration Law Module at UEL.

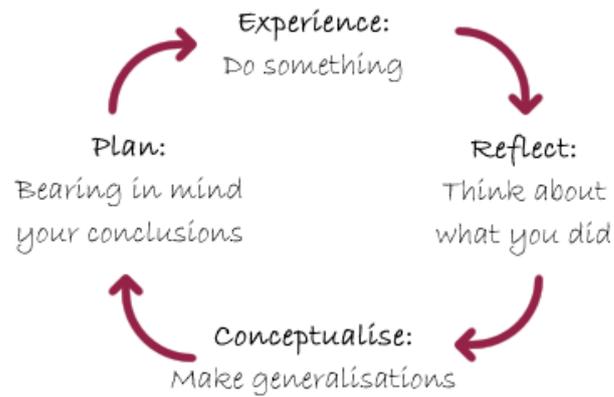
I am involved in preparing the course material, scheme of work (Course and Study Plan) in line with the pre-set Learning Outcomes. Those LO's were set in accordance with the accreditation criteria required by the SRA (Solicitors Regulatory Authority) and the Bar Standards Board for Barristers in England and Wales.

2- Feelings

To arrive to this mode of reflections, I had to go back to my learning process and to when I was a student. I constantly reminded myself that I was most successful in the subjects where the tutor succeeded to get me to be most engaged. I learnt about this fact when I failed Mathematics miserably in my GCSE. The following year, I scored 88% because I had a different "Educator" and he truly deserved that title.

As Shulman (2005) said "Learning begins with student engagement" (Karl A. Smith, 2005)

Getting students to feel confident in their abilities to acquire knowledge of the subject (Law in this case) and to have voice in the progress of their learning process is quite important. There are many tools and techniques to get learners to engage in their learning process such as Kolb's experiential theory which emphasizes that "We learn from our life experiences as much as we learn academically on every day basis." (Kolb, 1984)



With this in mind and as a module leader, I developed the content of my teaching material to accommodate this principal which is quite important for Law students. However, I ascertained the inclusion of different styles of learning to allow for diversity and cultural variation of learners towards different rules and regulations within the legal life to which they are to be prepared. The content and teaching styles had to be set in an interactive and engaging method as well as being open for diversity and reason.

Putting on the same hat I wore when I was a student, I am able to understand the learning needs of my students. Linking my teaching methods to how students feel and learn is indivisible in Education. In Higher Education, to teach is to learn how learners learn. (Ramsden, 2003)

I start by planning how and what my students need to know and master by the end of the Module. I get to know my students collectively as a class and individually each as a person (tutorials) to identify any personal needs and self-study styles. This is important in diversified classes such as we are seeing now in HE and not only in the UK.

I then set the material with individual lesson goals and objectives. Each with clearly defined outcomes in line with updated changes or amendments within the legal system or case laws. It is set with flexibility to accommodate students' diversified backgrounds and experiences. More importantly in Law, each person has their own experience with varied issues. I ascertain that the material can allow for varied questions to be asked knowing that in some cases there may be personal issues attached to it.

I noticed that this method gives voice to students and gets them to see value in contributing ideas through active participation and feeling that what they share is important. It is essential for students to relate the teaching they are receiving to a platform relevant to cultural or personal life background for them to seek it. (Hedy Chang, 2017)

3- Evaluation

The above emphasizes, sharing knowledge and being open to learning, forms a learning community generated from within the learners **social group**. Learners in that social group share their thoughts within a non-judgemental environment. They interact

as a group rather than individuals. Connecting to this, highlights that one way to get students to value and engage with scholarship is to build active classroom communities.

In the delivery or implementation phase, I seek to create a variety of contexts in which my learners can develop *critical thinking* abilities, express their thoughts freely thus making their learning process possible. It also equips them with the necessary skills for their near future careers as lawyers and legal workers.

How do I know I have taught successfully?

My ideal classroom is primarily a comfortable place where students of diverse background and experiences are encouraged to clarify their thoughts and expose their assumptions for how they expect to be taught. On whichever level I teach, whether UG or PG, I always plan that my courses are enriching and engaging to my students.

Parallel to the idea of discovering new things as a Lawyer is the idea of discovering new minds and cultures. Similarly, learning analytical legal skills are essential for a person who wishes to work as a Lawyer or within the legal industry. Parallels to that, is learning to understanding (tolerate) other's points of view.

Engaging Learners through activities "**Active Learning**" is a process I use to engage my students into *meaningful thinking* and *co-creating* their own learning experience. They then take that experience from the classroom into real life and further to when they get employed.

In my classes I try to expose the students to different situations to help them gain these skills. This includes interacting with peers from the same discipline or other qualifications such as Policing, Business and Marketing. This method brings **diversity** of different backgrounds (race, ethnicity, gender, technical knowledge) into line with learning and teaching. Students take different roles in workshops in teams (Policeman, Lawyer, Judge, Victim, Claimant, and Defendant). The students' individuality characteristics shows clearly when asked to individually evaluate the session's outcome.

Enquiry based learning and student-lead questions (**Flipped Learning**) allows students to join in formatting their learning process. Presenting their questions give them the chance to ask what may have been deemed to them as a silly question and would have refrained from asking it.

For example, one of my students asked me shyly if I, as a Lawyer would defend "The Guilty" if paid enough to do so.

The question was so interesting and intriguing to the rest of the class that side discussions started to erupt and each student began to express what they would do if it was them. Then they all fell silent and turned their attention to me for an answer.....

The question itself gave me an opportunity to explain two principles in law: - *Each person is entitled to a defence*; - *"An accused" is presumed innocent until proven "Guilty" in a Court of Law*. Hence you cannot technically "defend the guilty" because they have already been defended and proven guilty. Those are teaching principles I employ to develop the group's multiple skills collectively while encouraging critical

thinking for each one individually. This method promotes confidence and allows learners to share their thoughts and ideas especially if I couple it with **research inspired teaching**.

In my teaching, I aim to provide students with the opportunity to learn not only the theoretical aspect of Law and problem solving skills so to pass their assignments. I also attempt to make them realize that around them there is much to learn and know in real life practice. It gives learners also the right and initiative to evaluate me as “the Law teacher who also practices as a Lawyer”; *am I giving them the insight of the industry and how it operates out there in real life?*

In that I embrace *Piaget and Vygotsky* developmental psychology theories. In particular when it comes to relationships among equal peers in learning and teaching *versus* relationships based on authorities. (Lourenço, 2012)

On my side, I evaluate my performance and teaching when I observe my students in their role play and how their legal discussions developed over the weeks and months. I evaluate my success upon theirs. I practice teaching, I try to ameliorate my methods through using different teaching principles and further education. It is my process of self-evaluation.

On the other hand, using “External Evaluation” will evaluate my methods and performance of teaching in the eyes of an observer, probably with a higher degree of experience and self-evaluation techniques. This is invaluable and essential for further development and progress in HE Teaching.

4- Analysis

Although I use varieties of teaching principles and mini activities, case studies and videos to use visual and oral forms of learning (e.g.VARK learning styles), this does not mean that all students share the same learning abilities. In exploring the feedback from the students in more depth, it is apparent that some students found parts of the lecture challenging and that I should have gone through the content slowly. The feedback might have reflected the evaluation of a few students out of the class but they still represent a population. In that I believe that my role as a teacher is to motivate and facilitate learning not to transfer information.

Prepping the students for the lesson is an example for warming up the class before the lesson starts. Students who find the session challenging will need a step-up hand to catch up and this can be done through identifying their *needs and diversity* (e.g *reading or language impediment*). I hold on to Kozulin’s explanation of *Vigotsky* developmental psychology in that engagement of students with their peers and some presence of the Tutor can be a bridge over learning barriers. (Kozulin, 1999)

Conclusion

In my reflective statement, I have tried to reflect and explain my teaching practice and as observed by my peers, students and external observers. I am active in my on-going professional development in teaching, learning and putting the **learner at the centre of the learning process**.

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