



Dr. Nicole Coomber

TeachTalks

Transcript

- Hi, my name is Dr. Doireann Renzi, and this is Teach Talks from the Office of Transformational Learning. Teach Talks is a series of interviews that will highlight the brilliant instructional practices being used here at Smith. And also help new and existing faculty learn more about teaching, learning and how to thrive in higher education Hi Nicole.

- Hi Doireann, how are you?

- Good, welcome to Teach Talks, we're so glad to have you with us. So do you have an example of maybe difficult or even extremely difficult teaching moment that you had that you were able to learn from?

- Yeah, so similar type of exercise but it's called the change game and students actually pay a dollar to buy a game card. And I've done it several times and in my most recent time running it was with my largest class, it was like 120 students, and they're split up in similar ways there's employees who are, everyone's given a game card and the employees have a card with the number on it. The managers have a card with a M on it, they're told to go out in the hallway, and then they're given a seating chart and I tell them, "You have to get everybody in this seating chart, in numerical order, and if you do that then you get all the money that people put in." Plus I put in 50 cents for every student. Then I go back in the room and I tell all of the employees, that they cannot get up and move their seat and they can't change their card with anybody else or they lose their dollar. So it's set up from the get-go, so you problematic. Now I have rules that you can fire workers, so they ended up firing a couple of students and one student refused to move and then one student just left the class and I think it was very, illustrated to me that some of the problems that can obviously come up with this kind of exercise and that I need to have maybe some stop gaps in place to let them know, hey you're suppose to come back, so that we can kind of, because they basically left and they didn't get a chance to express their opinion. Now one of them did email me afterwards and gave some opinion. Now the discussion afterwards was incredibly powerful, but because one student, I think one or two students had just left they didn't get the benefit of that. So I think I've definitely learned and I think when I do it this time around, one thing is that I actually made the reflection on it part of their final exam. So their final exam is now a paper where they have to, just a kind one or two page paper, where they have to reflect on the experience, which will then I think get people a bit more engaged and actually paying attention the whole time. But then I'll definitely make sure I schedule a second class where we debrief the exercise. So they'll run the exercise in one class and then I whole 'nother class, so I had to cut out something else in order to do that, but I felt like it was important enough, because then at least if someone leaves, and was I think our last class in that particular session, if someone leaves then they don't get a chance to come and reflect on the experience and learn from it which is really the most important part of experiential learning. So, yeah that was, that was very, I learned a lot from that.

- No, but I think it's great that you were able to say okay where's the pivot?

- Yeah.

- What's the adjustment? And like you said I feel like experiential learning is something that people are really trying to integrate.

- Yeah.

- And that reflection piece is so crucial, 'cause without it it's sort of just an activity, right?

- Yeah, there's not the learning that goes on if they don't actually reflect on it.

- Exactly, so if you were to give sort of teaching advice, something that a new faculty member, you think they should definitely do or definitely know, what would you say?

- One thing that I've been asked is like, "Don't you get tired of teaching the same thing semester after semester?" Because I do, I teach our core management class it's certainly, some would see it as drudgery, right? It's not a popular class to teach, because it's not easy to teach. And someone said, "Don't you get tired of teaching the same thing every semester?" I'm not but it's not, right? Because it's different students, even if I teach three groups in a row I may be saying some of the same concepts, but the way the students react and interact with the material is completely different every semester. So I think, if I we're to give advice of definitely do this is let your students kind of shape a little bit of what's happening in the classroom, because they are bringing something fresh and new to it every single semester, and yes you may have said, I may have taught about expectancy theory what feels like hundreds of times, right? But they haven't learned it, right? They're coming to it from the first time ever, and so try to see things through their perspective, and get to know them.

- That's something I often tell my instructors, especially if they're like, oh no I know it, like I've got it. And I'm like but you don't know the students, it's a bit like driving you don't know what the other driver is thinking, or you know all the rules you got your license, but that's quite different for the person coming towards you.

- Yeah it's an interaction.

- Exactly, but you do eventually have to stop teaching and leave it all behind at the end of the day. So what do you do to try and strike a balance with that investment in teaching and the rest of your life?

- Yeah, well this is one benefit to so people say, "Isn't it boring teaching the same thing?" I'm like no because I have so much material that I've already developed that I can kind of go into my toolbox and I think one time, one thing that I really learned is that you have to limit the amount of time you spend in prep. You know, almost to the point of setting a timer. Because you can prep endlessly to teach a single class. If you do that you won't have time for all the other things that faculty needs to do and so you have to I think stop, set a timer for your prep, if you have the ability to get TA's and most of the departments here at least at Smith is something that you can get.

- And I agree, I think prep time at the beginning you're inclined to spend so much time-

- Yeah

- Doing it, and I'm not sure it has a direct relationship to how well the class goes, you know?

- So, there is some research out there they had this workshop on prep time and the woman that was running it said, "There's an inverse correlation actually, between the amount of time that you prep and the amount of satisfaction and learning from the students." And she also said that, "The research shows that women and minority faculty tend to spend more time prepping." And so there's a relationship there where actually the more time that you're spending, it doesn't necessarily pay the dividends. And so one thing that I do is that I, I know a lot of people are moving away from textbooks, but I have, there's a lot of great resources in my textbook, and I just use those. There's even activities, that you can do in class, that power and politics exercise, was basically adapted from something in my textbook, now I adapted from my own kind of purposes. And the other big source, the change game that I was talking about that came from one of the teaching journals from my field. So every field has a teaching journal and a lot of them have activities in them that you can just try out in your classroom. So you don't need to reinvent the wheel, especially if you're coming on and this is the first time you're teaching a particular class. They're almost always here to our faculty, who will share their materials. And so that's something to really take advantage of. I mean, every class I've ever taught I've literally handed completely over to somebody else at one point and said, "Hey, just do with it what you will." And then they make it their own, but you're not starting, you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

- Absolutely, and there are amazing resources at Smith. Thank you for being with us today.

- Thank you.

- I deeply appreciate it.

- Of course.