CASE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING EXCELLENCE
FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES

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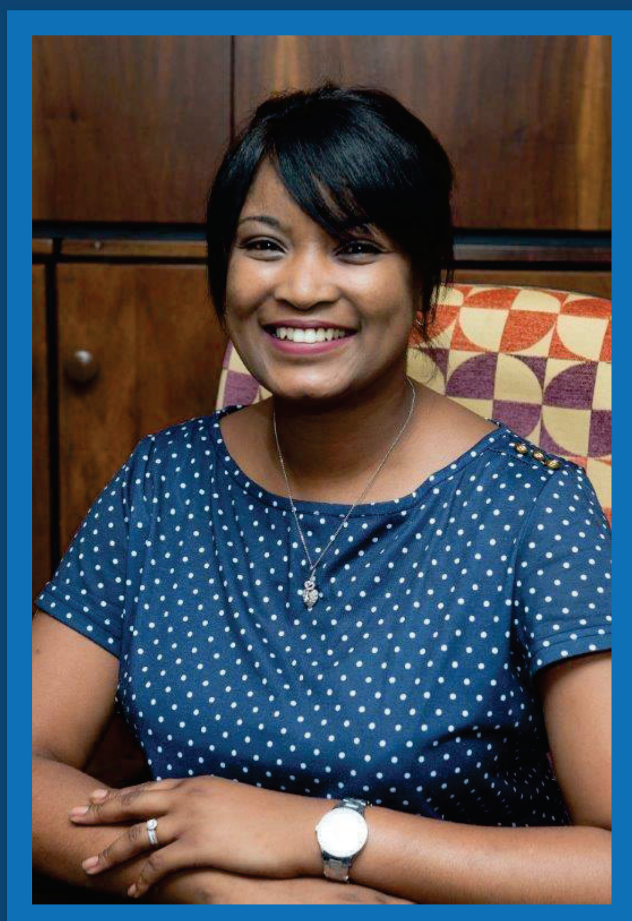

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1 TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

I view my role as a facilitator of knowledge and an enabler of active learning. Prince (2004) defines active learning as any instructional method that engages students as part of the learning process and encourages them to think about what they are learning as opposed to traditional teaching methods where students are passive participants in the learning process. Bonwell and Eison (1991) add that this requires students to do more than just listen in the classroom and relates to the three learning domains referred to as knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA).

This philosophy is not what I started my academic career with however. In fact, when I was asked to be a lecturer nobody showed me how to do it – I was just expected to do it which is often the case with most academics. The only frame of reference I had was my own learning experience and I consequently decided to teach students the way I would want to be taught. I also realised that at that stage I had already had two degrees but I knew absolutely nothing. The same modules I was responsible for teaching I remember scathing through. This is not what I wanted for my students. I did not want them to walk away from a module or a course feeling as though they have not learnt anything.

As my teaching career developed over the years I learnt that if I wanted to foster active learning and have students engage with the learning process, I would have to engage with them on a different level – beyond the classroom. I would have to make a concerted effort to engage with them on aspects that they are interested in and I would have to learn about what they know well so that their own literacies could be a benchmark for me. In my experience, I have learnt that even the most undisciplined, demotivated and uninterested student can learn to be a committed and disciplined student when someone takes an interest in them.

I am involved in the Financial Planning Society that was established in 2009 of which I was a member when I was a student. I have been one of the lecturers responsible since

2016. The aim of the society is to create a financial planning community that connects the students, academics and industry members in the field of financial planning. This year I was also asked to be a member of the business advisory board (BAB) for the Student Entrepreneurship Working Group (SEWG) as well as an academic member of Enactus. Due to my role as an entrepreneurship lecturer, my previous students recommended me to be an advisor and mentor to assist in developing student entrepreneurship at the university.

Currently there are many student entrepreneurs at the university but there are not any formal systems and procedures in place to provide them with the necessary resources and support. I am also a faculty representative for the BES Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee (FTLC). This is a position that I have held since 2015. Through this role I have been responsible for compiling and disseminating information regarding the language policy as well as academic literacy and multilingualism in the classroom setting. My interest and dedication to the excellence of teaching and learning has also afforded me many opportunities to engage with academic leaders at an institutional level at the DVC's teaching and learning breakaways.

I also take an interest in prospective students – when I was a prospective student I made the mistake of choosing a course to study as opposed to a career path to follow. As a result, I made choices that had a long term effect on my academic career. Apart from being actively involved in the university open days, myself and the department often visit high schools such as Pearson, Victoria Park and Hillside. For Hillside, a school in an impoverished area, I developed an APS worksheet that will assist students in determining which courses they can study, the necessary requirements as well as what they need to do to improve their chances of being a successful applicant.

2 REFLECTIONS OF MY KNOWLEDGE RELATED TO TEACHING & LEARNING IN MY DISCIPLINE

I am responsible for teaching first year entrepreneurship, second year financial planning modules and third year business management modules. Thus in terms of my teaching and consequently my research, I have two main disciplines namely business management and financial planning. Financial planning is a specialised field and to complement my BCom Financial Planning degree (2011), I enrolled and completed my Post Graduate diploma in Financial Planning (2015). I also have a BCom honours degree in Business management (2012) as well as a MCom Business management degree which I received *cum laude* in 2013 (the same year I started lecturing).

My research focuses on the fields of business management and financial planning thereby staying up to date with the latest trends in the industry as well as in academia. I attend National and International conferences annually, namely SAIMS (South African Institute of Management Sciences) and IBC (International Business Conference) of which I am also a reviewer. Other conferences I have also attended the ACERE (Australian Centre for Entrepreneurship Research and Education) conference as well as the African Finance Journal conference. I have three journal article published in DHET accredited journals and I am awaiting feedback on a fourth article which I submitted to the Journal of Economics and Finance regarding the role of the financial services industry in the South African social grant crisis. I am also a reviewer for the DHET accredited journal Acta Commercii.

When I first started lecturing my mentor at the time told me that the key to lecturing is preparation. This obvious piece of advice I find to be true, thus I always ensure that I am thoroughly prepared when giving my lectures and find that I often have to teach myself the content especially if I am not familiar with it. This also gives me insight into how the students might understand it. However, despite preparing the content and publishing research in my teaching areas, I have learnt that it prepares you for your role as a lecturer but not as a teacher.

It is because of the extent of my engagement activities that I am of the opinion that effective teaching can only take place once you acknowledge the individuals that you are teaching. It is important to acknowledge and be cognisant of students' backgrounds, upbringing, culture, language abilities, their academic literacy, individuality and especially how they feel about what they are learning.

3 EXAMPLES OF TEACHING PRACTICE AND HOW STUDENT LEARNING IS FOSTERED

I make reference to the entrepreneurship module which I teach to illustrate my teaching practices where student learning is fostered. This was one of the first modules that I started teaching when I first became a lecturer in 2013. It is a service module offered to non-business students, specifically health sciences and law extended students. Given that it was my first time lecturing I didn't want to change too much of the structure of the module.

In the business management department, the common structure is to have standardised semester tests and a scientific assignment that would count towards the students' final mark. The purpose of these scientific assignments is to prepare students for postgraduate studies where they would be required to write a treatise. I realised however that these students will most likely not do postgraduate studies in business management and that the nature of these assignments do not address the overall purpose of the module. I was also busy with my MCom degree specifically focusing on student perceptions of an entrepreneur. Through my studies I also learnt that entrepreneurship is a dynamic phenomenon which is difficult to be taught and best when it is experienced. I thus needed to simulate a learning environment where entrepreneurship as a field of study can be experienced by my students.

I came up with the idea of having students create a product using materials that I provided to them. The most accessible material I could find was paper clips, Prestik and elastic bands. When I first started this practical, I would give the students a limited amount of time to make their product and they would also need to present it to the class in any creative way they deem fit and convince myself and their classmates to purchase their product. I also did not want to warn the students about the assignment before the time because I felt that they needed to discover something about themselves when put under pressure.

I was pleasantly surprised when I realised that the students were using the entrepreneurial principles and theory that I taught them to both design and market their products. They did brief skits and advertisements to illustrate their products to the class. In their reflections of their efforts, I made them realise that when they were trying to determine which products to create after numerous failed attempts and before deciding on their final product, that they were doing actually doing a feasibility and viability study – something which I had taught them during the previous lectures. What was most important to me is that students realised that in order to be an entrepreneur that they did not need to have the characteristics of being creative (often associated with entrepreneurs), they only need to know how to address a common problem in a creative *way*. I have since developed this exercise into a formal assignment which replaced the scientific assignment. Students are now informed at the beginning of the semester of the assignment and more formalised feedback on how to improve their product is also given.

In business management, it is often a challenge to provide experiential learning to students especially given the large student numbers. The field of financial planning lends itself to more room for the practical application of the content. When I was a financial planning student, I was inundated with large amounts of theory especially legislative intensive text. Since teaching financial planning I know that this is often a barrier to learning for many students. I have thus changed the approach to personal financial planning (the introductory module to financial planning) to include more simulated cases of realistic individuals or households and also included determinations and court proceedings which I work through with the students during lectures. This has assisted them in using the legislation to make decisions instead of merely just recollecting it.

Another example which comes to mind is when I teach the strategic communication section for my third year general and strategic management students. To illustrate communication, specifically effective communication, I arrange the students as they enter the classroom to fill up the first row. They are then surprised to find out that we will be playing “broken telephone”. I whisper a phrase (message) to the first student who then has to pass the message on to the next student. The only rule being that they are not allowed to repeat the message more than once. Over the last few years that I have done this exercise the message has never been successfully transmitted. I then show the students the message on the board but I include a graphical illustration of the message as well. This illustrates that the “sender” transmitting a message does not necessarily mean that communication is taking place – communication takes place when the “receiver” listens, understands and responds to the message that has been sent. By showing the students the figure also illustrates how communication can take place verbally and non-verbally and that it is often enhanced when it is either written down or shown graphically. This exercise thus sets up the lecture on strategic communication and we continuously refer back to the exercise to determine how we could enhance our communication.

My students know that I have an 80 / 20 rule. Students must leave the lecture venue and approach their studying already knowing 80% of the work – the other 20% is the extra effort that they need to put in. This is because we constantly do revision at the end of the lecture and at the beginning of the next lecture and again after we have done a large body of work. They soon learn that if I am not satisfied that they know their work well enough I usually have an unprepared test or moodle activity for them to do.

Doing revision regularly gives me an indication of how comfortable the students are with the work. Quite often the students have a problem arranging information in a way that makes sense to them or that will enable them to see where one section fits into the overall content. To assist with this, I arrange students into groups with posters and markers and allocate a chapter to them to conceptualise using mind maps. At the end of the session, the students stick up their mind maps at the front of the class and all the other groups may take pictures of each other's mind maps (that way everyone who has contributed a mind map, has a mind map of every chapter or study unit). If it is a big class, two different groups will summarise the same chapter and compare and improve on the each other's.

4 STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

It is my hope that every student has had a positive learning experience as a result of the learning environment that I could provide. Both my parents have careers in education and my mother specifically, always said to me that as a teacher you should never aim to be a favourite or to be liked by your students – it is always more important to be respected for what you do.

5 LIST OF SOURCES

Bonwell, C.C and Eison, J.A. 1991. *Active learning: Creating excitement in the classroom*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1. Washington, DC

Prince, M. 2004. Does active learning work? A review of the research. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 93(3):223 – 231.