

From the editor:

Here I introduce you to an article written by Afshan Saleem, who has been involved in Business English teaching, communication skills training, development of effective Presentation skills training and writing for business English teaching for the last 5 years. As a lecturer of Management Sciences at Bahria University, Karachi Campus, Afshan has consistently been working on developing students and preparing them for the competitive job market by grooming them professionally on writing and presentation skills.

Ms. Saleem is also the founder and Chairperson of The Bahria Society for Professional Communication (BSPC). She has planned and conducted 3 mega events sponsored by major multinationals in Pakistan to bring the institution and industry closer, while improving the presentation skills of her students to deliver speeches on varied topics. Her sharing here is very valuable for us to understand the motivation and teaching style of academician from developing countries.

Why I teach? – An essay written by a lecturer from a developing country

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Abstract

If genuinely self-motivated, lifelong learning is to take place, if students are to develop understandings and analyses of power, justice, equality, identity, and freedom that enable them to grow as critically informed and active citizens of their communities and the world, the choice about whether to accept the invitation must always remain theirs. As a teacher, it is my calling, my continuing adventure, to make that invitation as compelling, engaging, and persuasive as possible. There have been few moments in my professional life capable of approximating the fulfillment of having students respond to that invitation to relationship with a yes. This yes, for me, comes as close to a visit from inspiration as it gets.

Keywords: Teaching in a challenging environment, Changing scenarios, diversity of students

Why I teach

Why do I teach? Teaching is my chosen calling. A calling I strive to undertake with devotion and manner that connects with rather than builds walls between other disciplines, and modes of

inquiry. I prefer to design my teaching strategy to stretch students in many ways—imaginative and theoretical, empirical and normative, comparative and focused—and an important measure of a student's success is his or her capacity, at the semester's end, to critically engage the course topic from a variety of perspectives and traditions. In addition to assessing a student's factual grasp of material. I use presentations, varied essay topics, and projects that are open ended with no single "correct" answer. I am more interested in developing a student's capacity to argue cogently, persuasively, and synthetically than in the particular content of his or her conclusions. imagination, and from my position as a teacher, I see no end to improvement, no arrival, no completion: I want to be a teacher who, even after decades in the classroom, can leave each session asking how the next might be better, how to better engage and inspire unique set of students.

I bring three clear objectives to the classroom, each of them rooted in my conception of teaching as an invitation to building an effective teacher-student relationship.

First, I encourage students into building a solid relationship and understanding with the specific course material. As a teacher of effective communication and presentation skills, I see my task as creating spaces for students to encounter—at both a normative and empirical level—fundamental questions of power, identity, equality, and freedom, and to do so in a classroom environment. Inviting my students into building a relationship with the course material also means encouraging active and participatory learning, and whenever appropriate I bring students into direct engagement with primary sources before turning to the various mediations of primary public speaking and presentation skills. Similarly I provide extensive feedback to my students on this and other written work they deliver. Secondly, I invite students into building a rapport with each other. Early in the semester, I learn each of my students' names and something of their backgrounds, and I model and explicitly lay out guidelines that make passionate yet respectful exchanges of ideas possible. To the extent allowed by class size and subject matter, I seek out physical arrangements that place me in a circle with my students rather than as one set apart behind a podium. This attitude of accessible partnership extends beyond the classroom to my office hours, my willingness to read drafts and suggest revisions, my midterm and final review sessions, my availability by e-mail and phone, and the midterm and final evaluations of my teaching which allow me to adapt to the differing needs of each new group of students. I take seriously my responsibility to guide discussion and to explicate new or difficult material, but I do so in a manner that encourages rather than suffocates thoughtful dissent and lively questioning. For example, I often passionately engage a particular point of view and then turn with a sense of humor to critique my own exposition. To nurture a sense of ownership and involvement, I typically assign two students to start each class period with a series of provocative and thoughtful questions about the material. In addition, I require students to post their reading reaction assignments to a class list-serve, and in class I often reference these postings by name and encourage others to do the same. I find great joy in watching a classroom of strangers grow into an intellectual community of interlocutors over the course of the semester. Third, I invite students into relationship with the larger world around them. I am always conscious of the ways in which the walls of the classroom threaten to hem in a stale air of unreality, and whenever possible I spur students to develop, extend, and test their insights in the broader world. When teaching grammar, I seek to relate big questions and themes to pressing issues and current events. I encourage students to extend analyses to countries in which they might have a specific interest. The culminating project of my Dirty and Dangerous Work seminar is an oral history in which students observe and interview workers involved in dirty or dangerous work and then relate their findings back to the major themes developed in the course. As I continue to learn and grow as a teacher, I view experiential and service learning as extremely promising areas for further exploration.

It is no accident that the word invitation figures prominently in my teaching statement. Ultimately, I believe teaching can be no more or less than an invitation to relationship building.

If genuinely self-motivated, lifelong learning is to take place, if students are to develop understandings and analyses of power, justice, equality, identity, and freedom that enable them to grow as critically informed and active citizens of their communities and the world, the choice about whether to accept the invitation must always remain theirs. As a teacher, it is my calling, my continuing adventure, to make that invitation as compelling, engaging, and persuasive as possible. There have been few moments in my professional life capable of approximating the fulfillment of having students respond to that invitation to relationship with a yes. This yes, for me, comes as close to a visit from inspiration as it gets.

As a teacher I strive to engage, challenge, and inspire growth in my students. It is my belief that every student is capable of tasting the passion that I feel for communication by becoming collaborators in the exploration of this domain in theory, research, and practice. To engage my students in the study of communication skills, I begin by crafting stories that draw them into the thick of the learning experience.

I believe that it is my job, in part, to share experiences with my students. I prefer to teach through demonstrations: by conducting mini-projects and analyzing the projects in the classroom, by participating in small group presentations and role-plays, by observing and chronicling behaviors from “the real world,” and by discussing clinical case studies. I aim to immerse my students in the topics that I believe are shaping today’s world. I believe that communication is a universal language of expression. It is best learned by immersion -immersion in the context that led the researcher or teacher to ask his/ her question about developing such skills.

To challenge and be challenged by my students is my second goal. I begin with the belief that every student possesses unique capabilities that can be shared with others if given the appropriate supports. I challenge my students to share opinions with and to mentor one another. I encourage brainstorming sessions, group projects, and group presentations. It is my hope that students leave my classroom knowing what it means to be a collaborator. I also expect to be challenged by my students—an expectation I hope to communicate to the class early on. I encourage my students to ask questions, and I am straightforward about not having all of the answers. When I get “stuck” I seek the participation of my student’s, my books, and the endless array of resources that can be found on the Internet. When I next return to the classroom, I share not only the answer that I’ve found, but also the process I went through to discover it. Above all else, I challenge my students to understand that I am open to their thoughts, eager to hear their opinions, and thrilled to learn with and through them.

Finally, I attempt to inspire growth in my students by giving them tools to take into other disciplines and into other domains of their life. Among these tools are a sense of curiosity, open-mindedness, and a thirst for knowledge. I would like my students to observe and begin to question the purpose and meaning of human thought, behavior, and emotions. After becoming skilled observers, I would like my students to use their tools to ask a few good questions, to creatively design a way of answering these questions, and to openly share their new knowledge with others. One of the beauties of effective communication is its ability to translate across many disciplines and across many areas of life. Although my passion is for presentation skills as well, in particular, one of the greatest goals I have is to teach my students to become motivated, insightful, and enthusiastic thinkers.

TEACHING SKILLS

It is with great excitement that I look ahead to being a professor, given the experiences that I have had with teaching over the past many years. I have been fortunate enough to be a teaching fellow in a number of courses beginning when I was an undergraduate at Stanford, and continuing during my time at Bahria University. In each of these courses, the professor offered me a great deal of autonomy to give a guest lecture and/or lead sections in addition to holding office hours, constructing exams, and grading papers. I am also the Chairperson of the Bahria Society for Professional Communication (BSPC) and have had the opportunity drive a number of key events bringing the industry closer to the institution.

MENTORING GOALS AND EXPERIENCE

My desire to engage, challenge, and inspire growth in my students is not limited to the classroom. Over the time that I have been at Bahria University I continue to work with a large student group as a research mentor and closely advise my students on their communication and presentation projects.

Finally, it is critical to note that classes and workshops that feature pedagogical issues are a priority to me, and I hope to continue taking courses similar to those I have at Bahria University in the future. I hold myself to the same standards that I hold my students. That is, I strive to become a skilled thinker and learner, and I believe that this process is life-long.

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