

Innovative Pedagogical Approaches to Access and Mental Health

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In this guide, seven instructors from the University of Toronto share their original and innovative pedagogical approaches to curriculum design that welcomes students with disabilities and mental health into their classrooms. These innovative approaches are designed to work within the parameters setup by the university (ie: evaluation, duration of semester, the process of disability disclosure and referral, etc.), and provide concrete ideas that effectively address issues of access and mental health.

This resource is intended for course instructors and teaching assistants working across disciplinary fields and who are interested in incorporating pedagogical approaches that address barriers in the classroom faced by students with psychological differences or disabilities. By following the easy “how-to” instructions developed and tested by the contributors in this guide, you will be able to incorporate these innovative teaching methods within your classrooms.

You can address disability and mental health through curriculum design to create a more inclusive learning environment. The approaches highlighted here include innovative approaches to group work, original evaluation and assessment approaches, and an innovative use of technology in the classroom. Access practiced through these approaches ensures that all students benefit from these considered and pedagogically-sound teaching methods.

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Kris Kim

Modelling Assignments Early

Kris Kim, PhD

Learning Strategist, Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering

Course: CHM379

Biomolecular Chemistry

Class Size: 20 students

Duration of Class: Half-year

Class Style: Lab

Kris completed his PhD in Chemistry at the University of Toronto. During his graduate studies, he was involved in several teaching and learning initiatives, such as serving as the Lead Writing TA, TATP Science Trainer, and Chemistry Teaching Fellow.

In a class with a large final lab report based on a semester long experiment, it can be easy for students to feel overwhelmed and anxious come time to start writing. To help students feel more confident and familiar with how to approach their final reports, Kris introduces modelling exercises early in the semester.

Students are first asked to reflect and discuss components that make for a strong lab report. After a take-up discussion, a summary of the discussion is provided, as well as a sample report from a previous year. Students are encouraged to read and provide feedback on this report. More specifically, students are asked what they would have done differently. As a take-away assignment, students are given another sample report and are asked to read and provide feedback, just like they would have done during the workshop.

Modelling can be used for almost any type of assignment. Here's how:

1. Find a student example to use as a model. Be sure to get approval from the student to circulate their work and remove their name from the assignment so they remain anonymous.
2. Start the activity by asking students to brainstorm all the elements of the assignment. This can be done as a class or in small groups. The point is to get students to start thinking about various aspects of the assignment and also to break the assignment down into "chunkable" pieces.
3. Distribute the example you want to discuss with students and give them time to read and take notes on what they are observing.
4. Facilitate a group discussion about the example. Ask students:
 - how the assignment has been organized;
 - to identify strengths and weaknesses of the assignment; and,
 - to identify the most important piece of feedback they would give to the author and why they think it's important.
5. Provide a rubric and/or handout on effective feedback.

Pro Tip

1. Find a student example to use as a model (*just make sure that it's not the same as the one you are using for your in-class activity*).
2. Provide students with clear assignment instructions:
 - Read the example provided
 - What are the assignment's strengths and weaknesses? (give them a number to aim for)
 - What is the most important piece of feedback you would provide the author?
3. This type of assignment should be low stakes. It could count towards the students' participation mark or pass if the assignment is completed.



Sandy Carpenter

Lecture Capture

Sandy Carpenter, PhD **Candidate**

Course Instructor

Courses: HIS308 History of Women Pre-1800 and HIS310 History of Women Since 1800

Class Size: 30-90 students

Duration of Class: Half-year

Class Style: Lecture/Seminar

Sandy is completing her PhD in the Department of History at the University of Toronto. Her teaching interests include medieval and women's history as well as accessibility and inclusivity in the classroom.

For all her lectures, Sandy uses lecture capture technology on her personal computer to record her lectures, which she then shares with students. Lecture capture technology allows students to make different choices about how they want to learn. For example, students in the class might be able to relax and just listen to the lecture in class, knowing it will be available online later. Or a student might need to miss a class or two due to a mental health concern and knowing the lecture will be posted later is one less thing to worry about when in crisis.

It also provides an opportunity for students, who have difficulty keeping up with the concepts in class, with a chance to review the lecture at a later time, at their own pace. It's also helpful for instructors who may have to miss a class for unforeseen reasons, and who still want to review that week's materials in a lecture style. For those concerned, lecture capture does not reduce the level of participation or attendance in class.

How To

The lecture capture technology, available to all University of Toronto instructors, is called TechSmith Relay and is an easily downloadable software program.

To download the software, visit the *Academic Technology Information and Portal Help* webpage (<http://www.portalinfo.utoronto.ca/lecturecapture>).

Under “*Help Resources*”, click on the link for “*TechSmith Relay Instructions*”

Follow the instructions for “*Downloading and Installing*” (<https://tsr.lc.utoronto.ca/relay/>)

Come back to this site (<http://portalinfo.utoronto.ca/content/techsmith-relay>) to learn more about how to record and share a session and to troubleshoot any issues you may encounter in the process.

All the recorded sessions will be uploaded to, and saved in your “*MyMedia*” file (<https://mymedia.library.utoronto.ca/>) which is accessed using your UtorID.

Support is available from the Academic and Collaborative Technologies (ACT) team (<http://act.utoronto.ca/>).

Pro Tip

Once the software is up and running on your computer, do a test run, ideally in your classroom.

Consider including a “recording policy” in your syllabus to inform students that they may be recorded and that you are open to having conversations with any concerned student.

To safeguard students, and your own intellectual property, make recordings only available to “view online” (and not downloadable) and restrict access to individuals with a UtorID. These settings are all programmable in “*MyMedia*”.

Explain to students why you are using lecture capture and some of the benefits. It will help them understand how they might use it and that it is not a substitute for in-class participation and discussion.



Maïka Sondarjee

Playful Teaching: Charades

Maïka Sondarjee, PhD Candidate

Teaching Assistant

Course: POL208 - Introduction to International Relations

Class Size: 20 students

Duration of Class: Full-year

Class Style: Tutorial

Maïka Sondarjee is a PhD candidate in political science at the University of Toronto. While studying the World Bank policies since 1980, she is also a consultant on the meaningful inclusion of women in participatory development projects abroad. She teaches critical theories and gender studies in international relations and she won the 2017 TATP Teaching Excellence Award.

Playful teaching, Maïka has found, improves students' engagement with the course material, especially for students with disabilities and/or mental health concerns. In her tutorials, Maïka uses the classic game charades to improve student retention levels. Making play a part of learning opens up the ambiance of the classroom to create a more positive space for students to learn. By promoting learning through creative engagement techniques, students' participation in class also rises.

The impact on students with disabilities and mental health concerns is also significant. Through this technique, students are able to connect differently with the material and improve their recollection of often difficult subject matter. More practically, it offers all students the opportunity to make clear visual connections to complex and intricate ideas.

1. Print and cut into small pieces the names of concepts/ideas covered in the course (alternatively, students can each write one or two concepts down).
2. Bring a bowl or a hat, the printed concepts, and a timer.
3. Divide the class into 2 or more teams (depending on the number of students). Tip: Make sure teams are diverse. Take into consideration the make-up of the teams, including gender, race, disability, and students who are more and less vocal in regular class participation.

How To

For Example

At the end of one session, students connected the drawing of an eagle to the concept of American hegemony.

There are three rounds, each timed for 1-2 minutes.

In the following rounds, teammates must guess the concept being described by a student.

Round 1: A student selects a concept and describes it only using words.

Round 2: Using the same batch of concepts, a student can now only use one word.

Round 3: A student is only allowed to draw the concept on the board.

In each round, the student can select as many concepts as time permits.



Charly Bank

Independent Group Work

Charly Bank, PhD

Associate Professor, Teaching Stream

Course: ESS345H -

Computational Geology

Class Size: 20-40 students

Duration of Class: Half-year

Class Style: Problem-based

Charly Bank has been teaching in the Earth Sciences Department at the University of Toronto since 2005. He facilitates authentic learning experiences by taking students on international research excursions and by having them engage in skills development besides their learning of the discipline.

Instructors recognize the value of group work for their students' intellectual development. Group work can be challenging, especially with regards to access and mental health. In his course, Charly implements and uses group work to develop code and write a report to describe the data output. Charly sets up group work to ensure that the entirety of the project is never fully dependent on one student's contribution. For example, Student A has to read and input data from a spreadsheet, while Student B receives a different dataset, already formatted for their part of the code (where usually Student B's progress would depend on Student A's).

To set up group work, students prepare a group contract, where each student's tasks and contributions are listed. This contract also specifies how to deal with unexpected situations. The benefits of this approach are that students learn how to work together without the stress that group work usually entails.

How To

Assignment Criteria:

Have clear expectations and communication with the students.

As the course instructor or teaching assistant, guide students in what makes group work happen and what impedes it.

Ask each group to write a contract, including everyone's commitment. This can be done after asking the class to share experiences of good and not so effective group work they may have encountered in the past.

Discuss deadlines and flexibility around it.

You can use different methods to create groups. For example, have students pick their own groups, create the groups based on students' strengths, or at random.

Break down the assignment into segments for each student in a group to tackle.

For coding projects, or for projects where students must rely on a previous step from another student, have alternative formatted inputs that students can use as a default, if their group-mates haven't completed their part.

Students are asked to produce one final product.

How to evaluate:

Grade each student individually based on their contribution and task completion, referring to their contract.

Give feedback both on the written report and the various steps within the project.

Pro Tip

If you do multiple group assignments in one course, consider leaving students in the same groups so that they can take on different roles.

For his five assignments, Charly prefers to maintain groups for the first three assignments, and then the rearranges students into new groups.



Alex Motut

Low-stakes Writing Activities

Alex Motut, PhD Candidate

Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Acting WIT Coordinator

Courses: LIN 232: Syntactic Patterns, LIN204: English Grammar

Class Size: 75-100 students

Duration of Class: Half-year

Class Style: Lecture with tutorials

Alex is a PhD candidate in Linguistics. She has worked at TATP and as Lead Writing TA in Arts and Science's WIT (Writing Instruction for TAs) program. As Acting WIT Coordinator, she works with TAs and faculty to incorporate discipline-specific writing instruction and assessment into courses.

Alex incorporates low-stakes writing activities into her classroom because they make writing more accessible for students, decrease anxiety around writing, and increase student engagement in the course. The core of any low-stakes writing activity is that they are small, can be completed in or outside of class, and aren't evaluated other than for participation.

Low-stakes writing activities are also useful for many other reasons. They:

- diversify the ways in which students can participate;
- allow students to explore writing as a way of learning;
- help students build up the skills they need to work on course assignments;
- encourage students to think about what they are learning and what they are struggling to learn; and,
- help instructors check-in with their students.

How To

Here are some activities you might consider incorporating in your tutorials or classrooms:

One-minute paper: Ask the class to write for one minute in response to a question (or prompt) provided. The prompt should be focused and specific, but open-ended enough to encourage thoughtful writing.

Write-pair-share: Give students two minutes to write down their response to a question, or reflect on material presented. Have students turn to a partner and share their thoughts. After an announced time limit, call on a few students to share their ideas with the class.

Write a headline or tweet: Ask the class to summarize their thoughts by writing them out as the sort of headline that they might see in a newspaper, or to capture the theme of a lecture or discussion as a 280-character tweet. The headline should be focused, clear, and informative: these headlines should aim to communicate the author's position, idea, or approach.

Clearest point/muddiest point: After a lecture or a tutorial, ask students to write down the idea that they think they understand the best and the idea that they are struggling with the most. They can give it to you as they leave the class.

Ticket-out-the-door or Ticket-in-the-door: Ask students to respond to a prompt at the end of class (possibly summarizing a key concept or responding to a question from class), or use a brief writing activity at the beginning to focus everyone on the day's topic.

General Tips

There are many different ways to approach low-stakes writing. The main point is to get students to write things down, which makes this approach so flexible and adaptable. Here is some general advice:

Set expectations at the beginning of the term:

Tell students that low-stakes writing activities will be happening throughout the term.

Tell students why: Discuss the benefits of "writing to learn" with your students.

Do it regularly: make it a part of every class.

Don't grade it: Tell students that these activities are about learning, not evaluation.

Writing as participation: Use low stakes writing activities to measure engagement.

Anne McGuire

Accessible Pedagogical and Arts-Based Evaluations



Anne McGuire, PhD

Assistant Professor

Course: NEW 241:
Introduction to Disability
Studies

Class Size: 80 students

Duration of Class: Full-year

Class Style: Lecture

Anne McGuire is an Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream in the Equity Studies Program at the University of Toronto. Her teaching and research draw on interpretive perspectives in disability studies and cultural studies and focus on disability representations and questions of human vitality and precarity.

Arts-based evaluations, in Anne's disability studies course, ask students to bring their understanding of course themes and theories together with practice by producing alternative, accessible representations of disability. Examples of past student assignments include pencil-drawing or painting, photograph or photographic series, pastiche, tapestry, spoken word, dance, poetry, audio or video recording, sculpture, short story, musical composition, performance art, as well as short essay format.

All art pieces are accompanied by an artist statement in which students explicitly connect their work to course texts, ideas, and themes. Students can also submit a traditional written assignment, if they prefer. The assignment strives toward being more accessible by addressing and welcoming diverse means for students - including disabled and mad students - to communicate their knowledge and understanding of the course content.

How To

Introduce the assignment early in the class to get students thinking.

Ground assignment in course themes and theories.

Keep assignment guidelines and objectives clear but be flexible and open to considering different approaches to the assignment.

Provide students with lots of examples of past student work and encourage them to explore theme-specific art in local galleries or other arts spaces.

Provide students with a series of carefully chosen guiding questions that can help students better critique their own creative work.

Find ways of celebrating the outcomes of the assignment. Allow students the opportunity to share their work, whether it be in the context of an in-class salon or program/departmental event.

Weight the assignment relatively low (15% or so) to encourage students to take risks.

Consider dedicating an entire tutorial or parts of a lecture to open discussion and explanation of the assignment.

Evaluation should focus on ensuring the student has demonstrated a clear understanding of the course theme, that they've answered or addressed the question(s) posed to them in the assignment description, and that they put effort into creating their project.

For Example

As a way to 'create disability differently', Grey (in the image below) made an accessible weighted blanket, that both reflected the richness of an intersectional queer-disability identity and that was made with low cost materials. Different parts of the blanket include different design textures and features to occupy and soothe anxious hands and bodies. In their written statement, Grey identified that the market cost of this kind of blanket is often prohibitive for many disabled people. The result is a stunning, rainbow coloured, hand crocheted blanket.



Paola Bohórquez

A Translingual Approach to Assessment Practices



Paola Bohórquez, PhD

Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream

Acting Coordinator of the English Language Learning Program

Paola Bohórquez is the Acting Coordinator of the ELL Program during the 2017-18 academic year and an Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream in the Faculty of Arts and Science. Paola's current scholarly work focuses on innovative methods for teaching academic English to linguistically diverse students.

In evaluating students' written academic work, a common concern is how to assess language errors and idiosyncratic writing styles. While traditional perspectives on assessment focus on how to address and correct the actual text's deviations from a hypothetical standard text (correctness-based approaches), a translingual approach focuses on how to enhance the student's potential to negotiate and engage critically with the dominant codes of academic writing.

As such, this framework aims at expanding the student writer's level of control and awareness, as well as their range of choices, in the process of appropriating the writing conventions in specific disciplines and academic genres. While this approach brings pedagogical benefits to all student writers, it is particularly advantageous for basic writers, multilingual students, and speakers of non-privileged varieties of English whose linguistic difference is often stigmatized in academic learning settings.

How To

Think of your feedback as helping the student create a bridge between the draft they have submitted and an improved version. Consider these questions:

- What is this particular text trying to say?
- What feedback could help the student “say it better,” more clearly, more precisely, or even eloquently?

Be attentive to the sociolinguistic positioning of the writer and whether this undermines your pedagogical stance by introducing bias or clouding your judgement.

Assess the student’s work in relation to the specific learning outcomes outlined for each assignment rather than in relation to a hypothetical “ideal” text.

Distinguish between “error” and “difference.” A student’s potential lack of knowledge and experience in reproducing the dominant codes of academic discourse should not outweigh the student’s potential to develop their own voice and style.

Focus most of your attention on the quality of thinking and the development of ideas.

Sentence-level errors are rarely random: Show the student the consistent logic underlining their texts’ stylistic or grammatical deviations and how these might compromise the clear expression of ideas.

Whenever there is opportunity, praise the student’s compelling or thoughtful writing. Encourage the student to reflect on what they have achieved and how, as a way to enhance their metalinguistic awareness and develop their writing voice.

Pro Tip

Students’ desire to “sound academic” and to imitate the expected academic writing conventions may lead them to write awkward and convoluted sentences. In these cases, invite the students to clarify by writing shorter sentences or by rephrasing