

Introducing Alison

My colleague and I co-interviewed Alison in a café at the university. Alison was my first interviewee in this project, and I was unsure if the interview would go well. It turned out that I worried too much. There was no doubt why Alison had a reputation in teaching within the university. Alison is an Associate Professor and has been teaching within her discipline for around 15 years.

The 4Es of employability

Our conversation started with an explanation of the 4Es framework and the research literature. Alison listened carefully. She did not know the framework came from existing research and thought it was an invention by us. However, it was apparent that the framework aligned well with Alison's pedagogy. In fact, her pedagogy aligned so well with the framework that she commented on each of the four dimensions in turn without needing any guiding questions from us.

Enthuse

Alison did not talk about specific techniques for enthusing or, more broadly speaking, motivating students. Instead, she repeatedly mentioned the importance of addressing the emotional aspects of learning. As part of Alison's teaching she has students learn by role-playing specific events. This is quite different from traditional university teaching and may look intimidating and time-consuming to students. Consequently, Alison spends a huge amount of time convincing and preparing students in advance. She convinces them that they'll like the role-play games and also offers alternative assessment opportunities as a backup for those who are uncomfortable with this teaching approach. She feels it critical to recognise and celebrate her students' diverse talents and capabilities in her teaching. Alison trusts her students and is willing to let students take control of what they learn.

Explore

Alison intentionally designs her teaching to make students strategise in their exploration of content. Alison provides general guidance and encourages students to explore different primary and secondary information (e.g. video, newspapers and photographs). Students decide what to explore and how. They choose the information to be included (public speech, media interview etc.). Alison notes that using this approach means students gain an overall appreciation of topic, realise where their skills are lacking and develop diverse capabilities such as writing persuasive pieces, presenting orally in public and researching and reasoning, which are useful in professional contexts.

I was impressed by her teaching as it transformed the passive learning experience into the active.

Extend

Alison's pedagogy challenges her students' views and teaches empathy more deeply. She noted that young people have certain morals and priorities, so they make different decisions. Therefore, at the end of a role play, she and her students debrief. Students compare what happened in the game versus what happened in reality. Through such discussions, Alison says "students understand why certain things happened the way they did and realise that they have the power to change history."

Alison's careful design and close involvement with learning activities allow her to see different sides of her students and nurture a community for her students: "last semester we had two students in wheelchairs. One of them took on a major role and gave a speech as a politician. She was like, 'And I stand before you'-- because she's at the convention. And she goes, 'Actually, I'm not standing'. Everybody just laughed and clapped, and it's just-- she's seen the support of her fellow students".

Exhibit

Alison prepares her students to gain and more importantly demonstrate transferrable skills. The pedagogy she follows allows her to assess students multi-dimensionally. "It's not just based on one task. It's based on several". Her assessment practice gives the students who aren't good writers an opportunity to realise that they may be terrific speakers. It allows her students to see their gifts and attributes that are not captured by traditional academic essays.

Opportunities and challenges

Alison believed that teaching for employability almost inevitably increases the workload. She found herself working at night and not being able to pick up research activities during teaching time. She noted that the increase in the teaching workload would probably not drop even if she replicates what she did in the previous semester: However, these did not stop Alison. She obtained great strength from her students' support. She received countless gifts and encouragement from students, some of which kept her going.

Teaching has always been Alison's passion, and she cares about students. She firmly believes that universities should prepare students for their futures through teaching. She felt beneath the idea of employability is a set of attitudes, attributes and capabilities that are about citizenship and becoming a better person- an essential part of humanity education. She also cares so much about students' emotional well-being that she listens to and responds to their concerns, providing alternative pathways to help her students take the lead in their own learning and demonstrate their true ability.