

Preparation for teaching ict classes



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Name: Pauline Mulvaney 16212813

Description

I applied to tutor MT118 – IT Skills & Software Tools for Managers, to first year business undergraduate students in DCU as I would like to lecture in the future and this fits with my PDP. Additionally, I want to improve my presentation skills and presenting to a large group on a weekly basis in beneficial.

Mark Woods, a teaching assistant at DCU interviewed me to assess my suitability for this position. I had to prove I was competent in Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel and sign a signatory code. The weekly laboratory sessions covered file management, spreadsheets, document and presentation preparation and visualisation tools.

I was provided with access to a shared folder on Google Drive containing a list of students, module objectives and lab sheets for each weekly session. I was required to take attendance and update the teaching assistants if there were any issues in my weekly sessions or if there were students constantly missing class.

Each week I prepared by going through the lab sheet for that week and making notes to ensure we moved through the material in a timely manner. I also completed the tasks that students would be required to complete in the class to ensure I could deal with any student issues that many arise in class. This also enabled me to show students what the finished work should look like.

I was very anxious before the first tutorial as I had no experience in teaching such large numbers before. I also get very anxious when speaking in front of large groups. I struggled to get my head around the fact that not so long ago I was the student sitting watching the screen and trying to follow, I overcame this very quickly.

I chose to take part in this activity as it links directly to my PDP, in that I hope to lecture at some point in the future. The experience gained will help me to achieve this ambition. It also links to the presenting skills and time management competencies as it requires me to present a substantial amount of information and to help students complete the weekly class exercises in a short space of time. Each week in preparation for the class I would complete the class exercise and time myself, noting how long each

exercise took and I maintained that pace in class to ensure I had enough time to help students if required.

3. 1Week 1

Week 1 was an introduction to Microsoft Word. The day before I was due to present I did a technology check in the lab to ensure my laptop was compatible with the overhead connections. I also spent some time the night before preparing an introductory presentation for the class and also ran through all the exercises as I was a little anxious about giving my first tutorial.

First impressions last and I was aware that the first few minutes of my initial tutorial was extremely important. I made sure I was on time (to set up and start) and to put myself at ease, I dressed appropriately and endeavoured to be as open and confident as possible given my anxiousness.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (2014) says first lectures are important. Students should be welcomed, lecturers should clearly introduce themselves, the module and their expectations of students. To promote engagement in students, lecturers should appear enthusiastic and interested in the module and in the students. They should also ensure that they are organised and in control of the technology.

I learned that presenting for an hour isn't as difficult as I had imagined. Before this the longest I had presented for was 15 minutes, my voice always cracked and I let my nerves get the better of me, however, after the initial nervousness settled down I found myself enjoying the experience. The students were all engaged and I answered any questions they had with ease.

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I gave them hints and tips I had picked up during my own studies and explained how important well formatted documents are and how they can be used to create a good first impression with lecturers during and professionals in the future. I feel it's important to link class material to something students can see benefitting them now and in the future.

“ Students should see the value of your module in how you set the context using a relevant problem or example and possibly link the content to a personal research/interests/news story etc.” (McGrath, 2014).

3. 2Week 2

This week's tutorial focused on PowerPoint, again, I spent some time the night before preparing the required material and completing the exercises to enable me to show students how they should look when complete. I presented two contrasting sets of slides to show students how much more effective a well-structured and thought out presentation looks and to demonstrate the effects of colour in presentations.

3. 3Week 3

This week we moved onto Excel with an introduction to the basics. I was aware that students may not have used a software application like Excel in the past and this might be a little more challenging than the previous two week's material. I explained that most of the formatting functions were the same as those used in Word and Excel and went through some basic formulas and formatting exercises.

I learned the benefit of having a teaching persona this week. I had a meeting with one of my course lecturers during the week and we discussed my

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participation in the tutorial POD and his advice to me was to ‘act like a lecturer’. Further research has shown that the persona you choose should be related to the event and speech purpose. In creating your public persona, you should consider the speed at which you speak, it should vary to fit your message. Vocal variety in terms of tone, rate and pauses should also be considered as should voice projection, eye contact and gestures (Alberts, 2010).

I also assessed my ability to present knowledge this week. Teaching is characterised by descriptions that focus on presentation, in addition to background emphasis on covering the work on schedule, with the purpose of teaching seen as presenting or conveying knowledge. Thinking back to my undergraduate studies in modules similar to the one I’m instructing on my motivation was at times driven by the lecturer’s instructional ability. I felt I was improving and students appeared to be engaged and had no issues asking questions. I also adopted a practice of walking around the room when students were completing class exercises, this enabled me to see how students were progressing and offer help if needed.

3. 4Week 4

This week we moved onto medium level exercises and it was by far the most challenging week, not least because the lab sheets had indicated that students had access to spreadsheets that formed the basis of the exercises on Loop, which they didn’t. This meant students had to copy the exercise from the overhead and this severely impacted my ability to move through the required material and help those struggling with any aspect of the material, of which there were a few. Some students didn’t get to finish their

exercises and I was conscious that they may not have fully understood the concepts, I emailed the entire class the files that should have been on Loop and my finished exercises asked them to run through them in their own time and let me know if there was anything they needed me to go over when we next met. I also emailed the teaching assistants and asked them to ensure students had access to the required files in advance for classes in the future.

3. 5Week 5

I was absent for this class as it was my graduation. I informed the teaching assistants well in advance to ensure they had time to arrange someone to cover and passed on my class attendance list to enable them to take attendance.

3. 6Week 6

This week had been set aside for revision and to enable students to ask questions in relation to any material covered in the previous weeks and get help with their continuous assessment work for the module. I took this opportunity to recap the material from week 4 and week 5 to ensure students had grasped the material covered. I learned that my work over the previous weeks had been understood and applied to student's continuous assessment pieces. It also provided me with an opportunity to show students how to add some finesse to projects.

As stated in my PDP, presentation skills are a core competency within the management consultancy field. A clear and logical structure is critical to the effectiveness of your presentation. Not only do you need to walk someone from point A to point B but, along the way, you need to convince them with a

data-backed argument (Skills You Need, n. d.). Taking part in this POD has enabled me to develop my presentation skills on a weekly basis and improve my delivery, in addition to helping me overcome presentation anxiety.

Jaj Modi (2009), a management consultant with over 15 years' experience in the industry lists the following as essential skills:

- Analytical and syntheses skills (e. g. the ability to delve into deep data analysis and then synthesise the key messages / “ so whats”)
- Excellent written communication (to produce Word and PowerPoint reports)
- Strong PowerPoint presentation creation (essential for developing client presentation packs)
- Commitment to delivering excellent client service (i. e. the desire to put in the long hours when you have to ensure a quality deliverable for the client)
- Excellent verbal communication skills (e. g. being able to communicate in a structured manner during internal and external meetings)
- Excellent team skills- successful consultants can work in diverse teams, under tight deadlines, to deliver quality work for clients
- Highly organised – days may include various activities. The ability to schedule and follow through with these activities is vital

Participation in this POD has helped me develop and hone many of these skills. In particular, my PowerPoint creation and verbal communication skills. It was Seneca a Roman philosopher that said “ While we teach, we learn” and in teaching this module I feel I have further enhanced my PowerPoint

skills. Having to stand in front of a large group on a weekly basis has greatly improved my ability to communicate in a structured manner.

When I applied to be a tutor for this POD, I didn't realise how important leadership would be to my role. Most successful tasks require leadership. Within this role, I was both a leader and follower. I learned from the teaching assistants, whilst also working to motivate and help the students. In the past I have studied contingency and relationship leadership theories to enable me to become a successful leader. Throughout the semester, I found myself relying on the behavioural and situational theories in addition to those previously mentioned.

Bass' (1985) transformational leadership theory focuses on the idea that leaders motivate and inspire by helping group members see the importance and higher good of the task. His work is an extension Burns (1978) transforming leadership theory, Bass explained the psychological mechanisms that underlie transforming and transactional leadership. He also explained how transformational leadership could be measured, in addition to, how it impacts follower motivation and performance.

I thoroughly enjoyed interacting with the students over the six weeks. I endeavoured to link class material to their assignments and future careers. I also sent out emails to remind students about weekly CA's and for larger assignments. I always included reasons as to why these assignments are important. For example, I reminded the students that the weekly quizzes individually amounted to a few small marks that may seem insignificant but when they are graded collectively they can increase or decrease overall

grades significantly. I am of the opinion that giving students an understanding of how important their individual pieces of work is to their overall grade will help them motivate them to do their assignments.

I would consider emotional and intellectual fulfilment to be two very important factors for me in a career and this was shown to be true in the personality tests undertaken for a previous NGM assignment. Having had the opportunity to tutor a class I can see that it is about much more than showing up and completing a series of tasks. You get the opportunity to make a difference in a student's life. Unlike my previous career in hospitality where you cater to the needs of customers who don't necessarily appreciate the work you are doing.

Each week I left the class with a huge sense of personal pride, satisfaction and increasing confidence. The role also requires you to remain knowledgeable and academically inclined – it is intellectually and mentally stimulating.

It was an interesting experience to be on the “ other” side of a class, it has definitely made me appreciate the work that goes into putting together a large lecture hall style class.

In this case, it will be both action and application. The experience gained through this POD has already enabled me to get paid tutoring in another academic institution. I am also currently waiting to hear back from DCU regarding paid tutoring on another undergraduate course. I might not have had the confidence of experience required to secure paid work from this but

for my participation. My self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations have definitely improved over the last five months.

I am also hoping to build on my presentation skills over the coming months. The weekly presentations helped build my confidence and I am currently considering Toastmasters to help me maintain this confidence.

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