

Reflection.

The following is a critical reflection based on my Microteach which focused on explaining basic Semiotic Theory as well as attempting to apply it to real world artefacts. I shall be using elements Kolb's Reflective Cycle (McLeod, 2017), as my main method of reflection to identify the positives and negatives of the session as well as analyse how these experiences could be built upon for the second session, later in the academic year.

Coming into the first Microteach of the year, it was hard to shake the nerves as teaching for a group of people was a whole new experience and I was so concerned about not to overcomplicate my subject matter or become completely overwhelmed by the experience. During my time as a student, I've helped multiple people and taught them small tips and tricks, when they needed it however, there had been very few opportunities to be stood in front of a group of learners and potentially teach something brand new and potentially alien to them.

To try and help this, I wanted to pick a topic that I knew inside and out and, as a film graduate, Semiotics (which is arguable used in every creative decision in the filmmaking process), seemed the natural direction to go. From here, I designed a lesson plan that, at the time, I thought best used the narrow time frame we were given by attempting to divide equally between physically teaching the learners and the task then and rehearsed it multiple times. Not everything went to plan, however as I often found myself lost for words and chose to improvise rather than carefully considering my words and I found it challenging to encourage conversation amongst the group. The feedback though, remained mostly positive, attributing most of these issues to first time nerves that, in time and with experience, should subside. Despite this, there are two further areas that I feel as if I did not only do well in but also didn't fulfil to my own personal best: my use of teaching strategies for adult learner and my use of emergent technology. During and immediately after the session, I felt as if I used both effectively however, it is only in further reflection and

research do I realise that, if I took more time or used my previous academic experiences, that I could have curated a much more effective and interesting session.

When trying to design the microteach, something that had not occurred to me previously was the idea that the audience of learners were not children but in fact all adults. While at first it seemed no different, the ways in which we learn is far different to the ways that we would be taught in secondary and desired much more thought and preparation. The term “Andragogy”, as coined by Knowles, refers precisely to this process of catering for the older student and how to approach teaching them. He divided it up amongst five key principles that put them at the forefront of their own experience, ensure that the learner is not a passive participant but instead takes some form of control of their experience: *“My foundational principle of adult learning in making presentations is that the learners be active participants in a process of inquiry, rather than passively receive transmitted content”* (S. Knowles, 1992). With this concept in mind, choosing not only the what the session would be but how also how best to get it across was the first task. After a quick bit of research on who was going to be there and what their previous experiences were beforehand, the overall pattern that emerged was they were from a practical and mostly artistic fields (Spanning from photography, fine art, sports, and another film student), so adopting an activity that they could apply the main theory to something physical seemed appropriate. This is because, in reference to Knowles, while myself as the educator is there to relay the basic information, it is them (the adult learner), who is taking more of an active role in absorbing and applying the learning objectives.

Next was choosing the appropriate level to both for the room. As mentioned before, many from the group had come from a similarly creative and visual background but, I couldn't go in and assume that they were familiar with Semiotic Theory, even if they had used it before and especially the sports students as it could potentially be an entirely new concept for them. That's why, by using *“Bloom's Taxonomy”* (Bloom, 1956), it was decided to work at 'Level 4' which on the graph equates to the apply stage. This is because I wanted to put everyone on a level playing field, assuming that this was a new subject to them, in an effort

to avoid alienating the non-art students. This is not only because most adult learning institutions (especially universities) start from but also can be used as a test run per se for the years academic placement as I will have to take a similar approach to teaching first year students who themselves may only be studying their chosen subject for the first time.

Despite the overall positive outlook on the session from this perspective, it was still difficult to gauge manage the levels amongst the room as some who I assumed would be much more confident with the subject matter struggled and vice versa. This could potentially be down to my use of time management and attempting to be overambitious given the strict thirty-minute time to explain a complicated visual theory and provide a task. While being ambitious could be argued to be a valuable skill ... warns of the dangers that it can present within a teaching environment as it cannot only leave learners confused but , if there are different levels within a group, create a curriculum gap (which I feared could happen in my session): *"If the official school curriculum covers too much, goes too fast and is too hard compared to the initial skill of the students and the ability of the schools to teach this can produce disastrous results. An overambitious curriculum causes more and more students get left behind early and stay behind..."*. (Pritchett & Beatty, 2012) While Pritchett and Beatty do mostly talk about this in terms of pedagogy, I argue that it still can apply to andragogy as well. One of the biggest differences between the two fields is the perceived skill gap between them, for example, an andragogical student has the potential to not only have been through the schooling system and immediately pushed into higher education, they could have taken years away from study and looking to return or, potentially even had not previously studied at such an advanced level before after decades out of education. While Gunn et al. tries to sum this up simply as there being a chance that adult learners may not have the previous foundations to accommodate a higher education level (Gunn, et al., 2007), it's not an easy as that. It's almost impossible to be able to cater for whoever walks into the classroom, so how could I avoid the mixed response that the microteach received? Overall, I can't but, what I can ensure is to pick a more universal topic for the next session and not deciding on a topic with the impression that, due to their academic origins, that most of the session would have been able to apply the lesson to the task with ease while others who didn't would struggle.

One of the key elements to the module was the use of emergent technology within our microteaching session and finding an appropriate use for both. At first glance and coming from a heavily technical medium such as film production, this seemed as if it was a simple decision to make however, after a quick introductory session into the area, it became apparent that I wasn't as prepared as first thought. Firstly, the room in which the session would be taking place were basic classrooms with no computers, which meant more technical aspects such as video editing were out of the window straight away. Secondly, with a strict thirty-minute time scale, it was going to be a challenge to set up equipment or go into elements in too much detail while also retaining a practical element.

With these seemingly out of the way, I felt left with the theoretical work and immediately jumped towards the tried and tested PowerPoint formula. As my chosen subject focused specifically on the visual elements of a media artefact, it seemed to be an effective choice of technology as I could not only communicate with all learners within the session but also practically made much more sense as I could show physical examples of what I was discussing and everyone could get involved at the same time. However, while many educators and other professions swear by the software, with thousands of help books that instruct on how to make the most of a slide show, such as Finkelstein and Samsonov who aren't shy in explaining its versatility: *"PowerPoint is a powerful multimedia tool incorporating imagery, sound, and text in one project using very simple techniques"* (Finkelstein & Samsonov, 2007), there are many who criticise its overuse and passive nature. Described as *"Death by PowerPoint"* (Wakefield, 2015), those such as at CMAmagazine, stress that improper use or lack of preparation before a presentation can be more harmful towards the audience and could often fail to ensure that information has been properly delivered: *"When presenters use PowerPoint as a script or overload each slide with text or data, it becomes a barrier between them and the people with whom they are trying to communicate."* (CGMAmagazine, 2015).

When it came to my own use of the software, although it may have seemed more appropriate for the more visual nature of semiotic theory, I feel as if I didn't use it to its fullest possibility and could have done so much more. For example, I purposely kept my slides very basic, as not to distract from the images or basic information (with the text slides even having highlighted key information for the learner to note down/remember), and

while this may have directed the focus to the artefact at hand, it is boring in retrospect. I could have taken much more advantage of the multimedia aspects of PowerPoint to not only include video but also sound examples to add much more visual variety to the piece.

Choosing the second technology proved the more challenging element of the whole process. With little knowledge of emergent tech and a short introduction that covered the basics, I wasn't sure what direction I could for the upcoming first session. However, it was at that point that I saw the use of the online polling software 'PolleEV, which used mobile technology to create a visual amalgamation of answers given by a group, and realised that in my lesson plan, I wanted to do a similar thing at the beginning of the session but vocally. Sun argues that the use of similar online programs, that allow users to upload answers and contribute to the activity anonymously, assist greatly not only in student participation levels but also that the unnamed nature helps to combat anxiety based issues within graduate and non-graduate groups: *"...it may reduce graduate students' anxiety, improve student outcomes in an environment consisting of both graduate and undergraduate students, and hold students' attention during polling activities."* (Sun, 2014) Assuming that the group of learners would more than likely be nervous and slightly uncomfortable for the first microteaching session, the anonymity of the activity was appropriate as it not put pressure on certain individuals to answers out loud but also could help those who, in the session had no previous knowledge of the subject area, feel much more comfortable as they could not be exposed against their will.

While the use of such software and its potential implications are still an emerging study in academia, with Florenthal arguing the need for further research into the relationship that these programs create between the student and the educator: *"A future study could investigate the value of accountability (summative assignments) versus anonymity (formative assignments) to students using the different mobile systems. Such a study would need to control for variabilities across courses, students, and instructors."* (Florenthal, 2018), I feel as if my use of them as well as PowerPoint, could be considered a poor use of emergent technology.

As mentioned before, my initial lesson plan had a small section where I would use vocal polling and PolleEv seemed an easy fit, and this is where I see the issue. The use of the technology wasn't there to necessarily enhance the teaching experience but instead it felt

like a fortunate coincidence that meant that I could fulfil the requirements of the assessment. This could be further argue by the fact that, at the beginning of the session, PolLEV didn't work for me and instead of panicking, I went back my previous model as if I never intended to use it. While this could be argued to be a good skill to have, as Ostling explains that a teacher should use such technology more as an aid within a teacher's arsenal and not to solely rely on it: *"...good teachers realize that they have to keep adding to their "toolbox" as a teacher and not just rely on what they did in the past. Technology doesn't help bad teaching, nor does technology used poorly help good teaching. Technology used well can assist good teaching."* (Eddy, 2004), if I were approach the task with the mindset of distinguishing the software used first and choosing a activity around that; I can only imagine how that could have affected the overall experience either positively or negatively. On the other hand, my use of PowerPoint is justified to the visual nature of the subject matter however, with my previous knowledge in video production, I feel as if I could have made the lesson stand about a bit more rather than sticking to the 'Chalk and Talk' formula.

Conclusion

Overall, I feel as if the first microteach was a minor success and if anything, offers up many alternatives when looking towards the next session. While doubts in my performance as an educator are still lingering, I feel as if the task that I chose helped to assist in getting across the information I needed while still providing some challenge to those who I assumed would cope more. In addition, I used technology adequately, opting for comfort and accessibility over creativity which, in hindsight is something that will defiantly change in future and may even draw from my previous experiences creating video production. The most important part to remember however is that this was my first time teaching any age group and especially having to do it in an academic setting with being marked on my overall effort. These nerves will go in time as I begin to do more and more and even the next microteach, despite being a longer session and potentially in front of more people, should be more relaxing as I have already started to see the holes in my performance and can use them to slowly craft myself into an educator.

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