Transcript

Shelley Dykstra (00:11):

Good afternoon, everybody! Welcome to our podcast all about teaching, The Teaching Scoop. I am one of your co-hosts. My name is Shelley Dykstra. I'm a graduate student at the University of California, Davis in the department of Spanish and Portuguese. I'm also a Teaching Assistant Consultant Fellow for the Center for Educational Effectiveness. With me is my colleague, Jasmine Wade.

Jasmine Wade (00:38):

Hi everyone! I'm Jasmine Wade. I am a PhD candidate in the Cultural Studies Graduate Group at UC Davis, and I am also a Teaching Assistant Consultant Fellow. So today, we are discussing an important topic for anyone who's considering a teaching position: the teaching demo! So you may have heard about teaching demos, but in case you haven't, I'm gonna give a really brief description. In the job process, you might be asked to give a very short presentation where you pretend you're teaching. You may actually be teaching a bunch of actual students, or you might be teaching in front of a panel of faculty members who are pretending to be students. And Shelley and I are going to dive into this topic today. Shelley, you just did a teaching demo, didn't you? How did it go?

Shelley (01:32):

It went all right. It went all right. You know, as you said, it's kind of part of a whole job application process. So I think considering everything that was part of the interview, I think the teaching demo might have been one of my strongest points. My Q and A, maybe I think I could have improved that part a little bit better, but my teaching demo? I did pretty good on my time, my participants were able to ask their questions, I felt like it reflected my teaching philosophy, and I felt like the hiring panel got to know me a little bit. What about you? Have you done any teaching demos recently?

Jasmine (02:13):

Yes, I actually did quite a few teaching demos this last cycle of the academic job market. All of the teaching demos took place at teaching institutions. So mostly at California State University, within that system. And I also did a couple at some small liberal arts colleges and it was a wide range. And so, like you said, there's a lot of preparation that goes into it, and it's not like a job talk necessarily where I kind of have a prepared thing and that's the thing I do at every school. Teaching demos, there's so much more that I hadn't needed to customize for different lengths and different fields and even different modalities, you know, thinking about like some of the teaching demos I did were on Zoom. And so having that be different from like giving it in person, right?

Shelley (02:59):

I love that you brought up how the topic will vary, right? Because for this past teaching demo that I did, I was actually assigned a topic that I have never actually taught in real life. So it was

my first time grappling with the topic. And then knowing that I was gonna present it to a hiring committee, you know, a panel of six, it was pretty nerve wracking! But I actually have another teaching demo that I'll be doing this Friday <laugh> and I'm a little bit more familiar with the topic. So I'm feeling more confident in it! <laugh>

Jasmine (03:28):

So Shelley, tell us a little bit about where you're doing them, and how long, and a little bit about those logistics.

Shelley (03:35):

Yeah, mine were also at teaching institutions, at community colleges. Teaching demonstrations at community colleges are very specific. They're usually very, very short: 20 minutes, 15 minutes, maybe 30 minutes, but probably not. And it's typically, always in front of a hiring committee, as you mentioned, faculty, um, colleagues in your possible future department who are pretending to be students <laugh> Was yours also in front of a faculty panel pretending to be students, or did you actually get to teach to real students?

Jasmine (04:09):

My teaching demo experience was very different. Most of them were pretty long, like the length of a full class. So we were anywhere from 40 to 45 minutes to 90 minutes. The audience was either a mix of faculty and students or just students. So I really got to interact with the students at the campuses where I was visiting. And that was really great. There was also like, you know, we're in a weird space right now. So some of the teaching demos I did were in person, but most of them were on Zoom.

Shelley (04:42):

Yeah, interesting. Mine was also on Zoom last week, and the one I have this week is also on Zoom. I think that's great that you actually got to teach in front of real students. Did they ask for the students' feedback? And do you think that the students' feedback actually impacts the hiring decision?

Jasmine (05:00):

They did. So at the end of each teaching demo, they would send a link to the students to fill out a survey. I didn't get to look at the survey, so I don't know what the questions were <laugh>, but they did get students feedback about how they felt about my teaching. And I was told that that would play a role.

Shelley (05:16):

Yeah. So from your, you said you did three or four, and one or two were in person, but the majority of them were online. Do you feel like you did better in one modality compared to the other?

Jasmine (05:29):

Yeah, that's a good question. I think for me, teaching in person always feels better. I don't know if it's because I have more experience teaching in person, so I'm just more comfortable and I just kind of go, you know? Whereas on Zoom, there's just more things to kind of pay attention to and literally more buttons to push. So I think that I'm really glad I practiced on Zoom before I actually jumped in to do the teaching demo, especially because I had certain text things and links I wanted to share with students and activities to do. And I wanted to make sure all the technology actually worked, which is not necessarily something I would be able to do in person.

Shelley (06:16):

Yeah, I actually really can empathize. I thought I would feel comfortable doing a teaching demo on Zoom <laugh>. And I was pretty surprised because I don't think, I think some of the ways that it could have improved were kind of due to the modality. It just seems like there's more room for error in the online world. And there was even just this awkward moment when I had to ask to be co-host <laugh>. So, you know, I got a little bit flustered and stuff, but I think I prefer in person demos. Yeah. But so what would you say was your biggest strength in one of your demos most recently? And what do you think is one of your areas for improvements, whether that's in person or online?

Jasmine (07:06):

I think in terms of things I did well, I am really glad I remained committed to being myself in the teaching demos. I showed up as the teacher that I am right now, in this moment. And I wasn't trying to be what I thought the search committee wanted or what the job call seemed to suggest, or anything. I was just, I wanted to portray: if you hire me today, this is what you're gonna get. And I think that felt really, it felt really good. It helped me be less nervous, and I think it made everything just kind of go much, much smoother than it would've otherwise. In terms of things I've been thinking about to improve on: it's hard trying to find activities that work within the restraints of a teaching demo, right? Like I think I went into it thinking, oh, it's just like, if I were teaching a class, my class, a class where I have control, they're my students, but it's not <laugh>, you know? I'm stepping into someone else's class; it's kind of this weird, slightly artificial space.

Jasmine (08:14):

And so finding activities that can work—with students I don't know, in that classroom that I'm not familiar with—was really challenging. And I'm still thinking about how to make that work within my field. What about you? Strengths, barriers of improvement?

Shelley (08:31):

I think the activities don't really differ very much from what I would actually do. I'm not trying to do anything fancy. And I think that it paints a really good picture for the hiring committee. You know, what a student would feel in my class or what a student would learn in my class. And it aligns well with my application materials. I think that I've talked about these things metacognitively in my application materials, in my teaching philosophy statement or in my cover letter. And it also reflects even some of the students' comments in their evaluations that I also

typically send to the hiring committee. So I think that that's a strength that I have when I deliver teaching demos. And an area for improvement? This is what I do in life: I always try to do too much. <laugh> I always plan too much.

Shelley (09:18):

And there's kind of a common technique that's used in language classes where a lot of the grammar explanations come at the end of the lesson versus at the beginning, and this is kind of shifting in our field. So that's something I'm kind of struggling with, cuz that's advice I got was to make sure that there is a part of the demo where you are delivering content, right? The committee wants to know that you can demonstrate mastery of the subject matter. So make sure that that's part of your demo and then the other part of your demo, make sure that there's a part where they're engaged in an activity and where they have a chance to interact with each other, especially for my discipline for language courses. So if I'm flipping that and I'm doing kind of the delivery at the end, but I plan too much and I run out of time then the, the hiring committee doesn't really see that part <laugh>

Jasmine (10:11):

Right, right.

Shelley (10:12):

Yeah. So trying to just manage my time, something I've always struggled with, especially in a 15-, 20-minute teaching demo. So we've kind of hit on some good topics, Jasmine, right? We've talked about how different modalities can affect your teaching demo. We've talked about how your demo is part of a larger packet or criteria for hiring, you know? Part of the whole interview process. What are some of the other things that we've mentioned?

Jasmine (10:43):

We've talked about the different institutions, that we both have very different experiences with teaching demos, but it all falls under the heading of the teaching demo, right? And I think that can be tricky, especially if you're applying to multiple different kinds of schools.

Shelley (11:01):

What do you think? Should we turn it over to our invited guests and see what they think, see what they see, what expertise they have to share?

Jasmine (11:10):

Yeah!

Jasmine (11:22):

And now we'd like to welcome Nina Fontana to our little podcast room here! Nina is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California, Davis in collaboration with USGS Southwest Climate Adaptation Science Center. She was also our colleague at the Center for

Educational Effectiveness for three years at UC Davis. She has 15 years of teaching experience in both secondary and post-secondary settings, both internationally and nationally, and is committed to fostering creativity, inquiry and critical thinking, both in and out of the classroom. Nina has done multiple teaching demonstrations in the context of high school classroom observations and has just recently done one last year for a four-year university professor position. Nina, thanks so much for being here with us today! I was wondering if there's anything you'd like to tell us about yourself that wasn't included in your bio?

Nina Fontana (12:20):

Oh my goodness. Well, first off, thank you for such a warm and welcoming introduction. I guess the only thing I'd add is that, uh, even in my postdoc doctoral position, I'm still educating and education is still an important part of my research.

Shelley (12:42):

Thank you, Nina! I'm glad to hear that education is still an important part of your research, and we really wanna know a little bit about your experience with teaching demos. So, we know you just recently had one? Was that last year or just a few months ago?

Nina (12:57):

It was last year. It went by so quickly! Yeah, about this time last year.

Shelley (13:02):

Yeah. I remember practicing it, and it feels like it was just yesterday. So could you tell us a little bit about that and maybe how it compared to getting observed in a high school context?

Nina (13:13):

Yeah. So if you get to the teaching demo stage in an interview you've already gone through a couple of interviews either with a couple of faculty members or a chair. So that's a little bit different. You've already gone through some hoops versus teaching and getting an observation in high school. You tend to know your students already when you're being observed in a teaching demo. It really is sort of like a blank slate where you're entering a very new classroom. You don't have a rapport. And so you're really banking on good teaching strategies that are evidence-based and you know will work. And so you're really leaning into that pretty hard, I would say. So they told me upfront what it was gonna be like. So getting those expectations upfront was comforting to me because I knew I don't have that rapport.

Nina (14:12):

So I knew it was gonna be 50 minutes. I knew that I could teach a topic of my choice, so that was sort of nice, but they also had parameters. And so the parameters were the topic has to be suitable for an introductory environmental science course. But then the other part was that I needed: they wrote to infuse a component of my research into the classroom. So the parameters were unique, I would say versus teaching in other contexts. So I knew I had to prepare in a very specific way. I couldn't just reuse something I've used before.

Nina (14:57):

They were pretty upfront, you know: "50 minutes, We want these components." Presume that you're gonna have science and non-science majors in the audience, that they have a basic understanding, and they listed what the understanding was. You know, algebra, they told me. And then afterwards they said there would be a Q and A, there would be eight to 10 people in the room. And I wanted to know who those eight to 10 people in the room were. So, I had follow up questions. I said, are there gonna be students, are there gonna be faculty? And they said there would be four to six students and a few faculty. So it was very vague. I was like, oh, well, okay. And of course what ended up happening was something a little bit different. So I think, the preparation you have to prepare for all configurations of the classroom, cuz I think that was really what I was most anxious about. I would say I wasn't worried about my teaching. I was worried about how could I connect with the people in the room? And so I wanted to know who those people were. And so that was really what I prepared for that sort of variation of folks in the room.

Jasmine (16:13):

Thanks for that, Nina. It sounds a bit stressful, actually <laugh>, hearing you describe it, just like kind of not knowing what's in the room, not knowing what the, what the setup is. And so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how you prepared, and what that preparation looks like, and also how it differed from say how you would prepare for a lesson you would teach in a classroom that's yours.

Nina (16:45):

Yeah. One, that's a great question. One detail that I didn't disclose was that it was on Zoom. So, depending on what wave of the pandemic you're surfing, you may be asked to do a variety of different teaching demos, maybe in person, maybe in Zoom. So for me it was, it was Zoom and I, my comfort, like many of us, our comfort levels are in person. And so I had had some experience teaching in Zoom. And so that, that was something also to, to kind of think about. So kind of answering your question, it's really about two aspects, well, three: logistics, accessibility, and the actual material itself. So, logistically, I had to think about, they said 50 minutes, but I was thinking in my mind, probably sort of 40 getting the folks into the Zoom rooms. What if someone shows up late? Creating an activity that would give time, creating an active learning activity that would give me time to triage things if I needed time and then thinking about how could I group folks intentionally in the room if I was doing some sort of activity? And then accessibility.

Nina (18:08):

So if I was showing a video, for example, I wanna make sure that it had closed captioning or if folks are joining on their phone, how would that impact, maybe how they interact in the room. And I spent a lot of time rereading the job description and the core tenants of the actual university. So I go on their website and I really, I really focused and tried to pull out key terms. So they were really into interdisciplinary learning, experiential learning. And so I wanted to make

sure my topic was inherently interdisciplinary, which was fine because that's what my research was. And then I thought about, okay, what's the one thing about my dissertation that is like the base, the basis of everything else about my dissertation. So I picked a real, what I thought was like a really simple subject. Pick something simple and do it well, I think would be what I decided to do. Because they don't, they know that you're smart presumably and that you can figure stuff out.

Nina (19:13):

They wanna know if you can take what's in your mind and convey it and relate it and get a feeling of connection back from your students. Yeah. So I tried to pick activities that were experiential as much as they could be in Zoom. So I chose case studies because that allowed students to kind of delve into a topic or an experience and then come back and share it in a bigger room. So I think those are my three areas of preparation: accessibility, logistics, and then really leaning into what the institution was asking for in the classroom.

Shelley (19:51):

Thank you, Nina, for sharing! You hit on so many important things, you talked a lot about the different contextual factors that you had to consider the modality, whether it was in person and on Zoom and how you had to kind of go outta your comfort zone using Zoom. You talked about how you, your demo was with real students, which is kind of specific to the four-year research institutions, as opposed to community college teaching demos, because all of mine are, mostly that I've done at community colleges, are mostly with the panel. So getting to know your audience and you talked about, logistically, how could you fit all this into 50 minutes? And then you really described some strategies, like, you know, referring back to the job posting and using evidence-based practices, like active learning. But I know for a fact that part of your preparation was also practicing it with some of your colleagues <laugh> because I was there! Right? So could you tell us a little bit about what that practice run kind of taught you, and what you, what were your main takeaways from the practice run?

Nina (20:53):

Yeah, no, absolutely. So that was like framing the actual lesson. Like once I got it down, then I was like, "Okay, well now I gotta do it." Now, I gotta actually see if what I think I'm doing is actually being done. And so there were a number of folks here in this Zoom room, or on this podcast, that were present in my teaching demo demo. So I tried to <laugh> practice with folks who maybe didn't know anything about what I thought was like this really baseline topic, which I realized was quite actually difficult to teach, even though I thought it was super straightforward. And then, folks who knew something about teaching, maybe folks who didn't, who aren't really into teaching. But we all learn, so they can identify good teaching in that way. And I think that was really important.

Nina (21:54):

It was super, super important to get a broad range of folks into a room and really test what I thought I was doing. Because again, I was building it from scratch. It was not like a reused

lesson. I couldn't do a reuse lesson. And chances are when you get asked to do a teaching demo, they may place parameters on there that will force you to also have to create it from scratch. And so the feedback I got from doing the "demo demo" was really, really important because it strengthened these really big blind thoughts that I didn't, I couldn't pay attention to, or I didn't understand. Oh, maybe that isn't super accessible. Like maybe I need more time for that learning activity that I thought was really clear and easy. And oh, I did too much, you know? I think with the demo, I had had three case studies and I think I whittled it down to two.

Nina ([22:56](#)):

I just remember there was a lot more streamlining and a lot more guidance into making clear connections in a short amount of time. 40 minutes is so short. And so really creating those buffer times was really important. And then I was able to then incorporate it and I felt a lot more. It gives you confidence too, because you know that you've done it at least once or twice. And you've kind of ironed out some of those problematic areas, but I was still blindsided. So when I actually did my teaching demo, there were faculty members in the room. And then there were also faculty members that were showing their students. It was like a meta classroom. They had their cameras on their computer setup, and they were then spinning their camera around and showing like a group of students in the room.

Nina ([23:48](#)):

And so when I was thinking about doing my case study groups, I, in those first 10 minutes of my teaching demo, I was like, okay, well, this is gonna be different from how I thought I was gonna intentionally create groups. And I, thank goodness, I gave myself like four minutes to kind of be like, okay, this is what I'm gonna do now. And it worked out fine, but it really threw me first then because they had not told me that. And maybe because it happened within the last hour before, who knows? But I didn't know that detail, and that detail was actually…I felt like it was important to my teaching because I wanted to connect with people in the room. <laugh>

Shelley ([24:31](#)):

Yeah. So just to clarify, the students were not on Zoom. They were in a room with a faculty member who was on Zoom?

Nina ([24:38](#)):

Yeah, for some of them. So there were some that joined in a Zoom room by themselves, but then there's this meta classroom element.

Shelley ([24:44](#)):

That's great that you're able to kind of think on the fly. And it's important for us to remember, even though no matter how much we prepared, no matter how much we planned to do things a certain way, it's important to take those changes and—you know, whatever is presented to you, to be able to make adjustments, right? That's what we do in our day-to-day classrooms, but sometimes when we're planning a demo, we get so stuck on what we had planned that we are resistant to make changes. So that's great that you still did.

Nina ([25:12](#)):

Yeah! I mean, and being prepared, being like: "I can do this, I do this all the time." Like, you adapt all the time! So yeah, you're right. You're gonna probably end up doing it in a teaching demo, too.

Jasmine ([25:26](#)):

Thank you so much, Nina, you gave so much, really great information. And just, for our listeners, I'm wondering if you could choose just one or two tips you would offer graduate students who are doing this for the very first time. Like what's something maybe you wish you knew before your first teaching demo, you know, when you're just starting out fresh.

Nina ([25:50](#)):

Choose a simple topic and do it. That would be number one. It doesn't need to be the most complex idea of your dissertation or anything like that. It's just pick something simple, something that you're passionate about and do it well. Practice! Practice with a group of people who may not know anything about your topic, that would be a second tip. And then I don't know, the third is just if you've gotten to this stage—this is really not a tip, but a reminder to congratulate yourself and be proud that you've gotten to this point, because you've shown through your writing, through your interview, maybe you've provided an evidence of teaching statement, whatever it is that they're interested in your teaching, and to use that as a confidence builder in the development of your teaching demo.

Jasmine ([26:51](#)):

Nina, thank you so much for taking time out of your day and your busy life as a postdoc, to hang with us and talk about teaching. We really appreciate it. And, I feel like I learned things about teaching demos and just feeling really grateful for your time.

Shelley ([27:09](#)):

Yes! I second everything Jasmine just said, I really appreciate you coming and sharing your expertise with us. And, we all have a lot to learn and thanks for helping us.

Nina ([27:19](#)):

Thank you! Very excited to have been asked.

Shelley ([27:33](#)):

We are now going to hear from our invited guest Gabriel Winer. Gabe has been teaching English to speakers of other languages, ESOL at Berkeley City College in Berkeley, California, since 2007. They've served as department chair since 2015. And before that taught English and ESL at Contra Costa College and Berkeley High School. They also worked in construction, food service, and retail. Gabe has done about three teaching demos themself and has probably seen, they said about 40! So we're very lucky to have them as a guest today. So why don't you

tell us a little bit more about those three demos that you did yourself, and you don't have to tell us about all 40 that you saw, but kind of in general: what's your experience with teaching demos? Kind of both from the candidate side and from the hiring side.

Gabe Winer ():

Yeah, I did three teaching demos when I started teaching community college. So, one of them was at Contra Costa and one of them was actually at Laney College, and I didn't get the job, but the teaching demo <laugh> was really fun because the assigned topic was, you had to pretend you were co-teaching a class for carpentry. And they had a classroom full of real students, which we don't do for our teaching demos, but it made it really natural and it was really fun. So it was like 20 people who were actual students in the actual program. And I did a lesson about…the assigned topic was safety. And luckily for me, I have worked in the construction injury <laughs> *industry*. That was a slip because I had everybody talk about injuries. And we had language about that as a way to talk about safety, and I brought in some power tools. And yeah, then I also had to do a teaching demo for the job that I now have. And each time I was terrified and spent a long time preparing and asked all my friends to give me feedback and stuff. So I've definitely been in those shoes. They're always 10 to 15 minutes. And then I always spent days preparing for them. <laugh>

Gabe ():

I don't, I don't know. I'm not giving that as advice. It was just my, you know, agonizing about it. So as far as hiring, yeah, we always hold interviews for a part-time hiring pool, and I'm not sure how typical it is at community college to have to do teaching demos for part-time. We…I did for Contra Costa college for that department, but I think, talking to my colleagues, a lot of times, if you pass the minimum quals and you write a good cover letter, they might not have people do teaching demos for part-time jobs, but for full-time jobs, you always have to do a teaching demo. So I participated in a hiring process for a full-time English position a few years ago, and they interviewed a lot of people and had everyone who did the second round do a demo.

Gabe ():

So I saw a lot of them. And then we interview everybody. We have everyone interviewing for the part-time pool do demos. So the way that we do them is, it's the teachers who are interviewing. So it's typically two or three teachers, and sometimes a Dean, will just pretend to be the students. And we have the people, you know, we give them a couple minutes to set up and tell us the backstory, and give any handouts. And then they kind of snap into character and we pretend to be students. And I've heard about that and seen that done a lot. So, yeah. I think it's better to have real students, but that's also hard for people to set up in interviews.

Jasmine ():

So on the hiring side, I'm curious: what are you looking for in a candidate? Can you give us an idea of some like green flags, red flags?

Gabe ():

I mean, I would say like the question and answer part of an interview is really fake and it's not…it often feels like people are not able to be their most authentic selves because being a teacher is a very self-reflective growth experience and involves a lot of humility and learning from the students and learning from your colleagues. But in the question and answer part, you're kind of supposed to brag about yourself and <laugh> talk in a way that is not necessarily how you are as a teacher and a colleague, but the teaching demo, you get to snap into who you really are as a teacher. And that sometimes reveals wonderful things. And sometimes it reveals things that cause us to not hire people. So I would say, green flags are: people demonstrating that they enjoy teaching, that they respect the intellect of the students. Particularly because in my field—it's English for Speakers of Other Languages—

Gabe (33:30):

If someone is, does like excessive slow talking, or any kind of condescension, or snaps into being really authoritarian in an old-school kind of way, then that demonstrates that that's not somebody we would wanna trust with our students or that our students would have a positive experience with. But even like not ESOL, you know? I think that in any community college setting or university setting, students learn when they're connected and when they're respected. And so, when we see a candidate show that they, uh, delight in bringing out the brilliance of their students and that they can connect and be friendly, rather than being kind of like an authority figure more, then that shows us that they're gonna be a good teacher.

Gabe (34:45):

I like there's sometimes, like, I don't know how to…like there have been some teachers we've hired that we thought showed something in their teaching demo that we really liked about them. And we thought it would make them a good teacher, even if they felt like they failed their teaching demo and were really apologetic afterwards and ran out of time and all that stuff. So it's more like, it's only 10 to 15 minutes, you can't really do a full lesson, it's a snapshot. And so if they show a snapshot that reveals them to be a kind and caring teacher who is someone who respects the students and doesn't look down on them, especially as community college students, in that social environment that they really can connect and have that spark of, you know, being excited about what the students are learning and what the students bring. That's a big green light for us.

Shelley (35:49):

What are some of the ways that you evaluate a teaching demo? So when you've been on the hiring committee, has the committee created a rubric or do you take open ended notes, or what is the kind of the discussion that happens after the demo? Or is there a discussion?

Gabe (36:09):

I think sometimes hiring committees do have a formal rubric, and I have kind of an informal rubric and we totally discuss it after each candidate. The two biggest things are choosing the right level of material. So if you can go look at the course outline of record for the course that you might be hired to teach or go look at the websites of people in the department, even try to

find a syllabus so that you're hitting the right level and people more often than not shoot too low than too high. So if you're not sure I would err on the side of trying to teach something rigorous because most likely the people you're teaching already know the content. And so, it's not a question of like, are you going to fail to teach them the thing, but it shows that you know that level of content and that you have high expectations of your, for-now-fake-and-hopefully-in-the-future-real students.

Gabe (37:25):

So the right level is the first part. And then, the second important thing would be creating some kind of active, collaborative learning experience for the people, which, granted, is very hard to do when you have 10 to 15 minutes. It's people you don't know, you're nervous. So, people have done something that ends up being kind of a rehash thing out of a textbook, or they're just lecturing for most of the time, or they're asking us to do something, but they haven't really thought about what the thing is. It's like an afterthought to be like, okay, now talk about the questions or something. That scores much lower than someone who has thoughtfully created an opportunity for us to do something active. Yeah, so I guess like the right level, creating an active collaborative kind of student centered learning experience, even though it's mini and, and then just the manner of interacting with the students and, you know, even if the person is nervous—which we all understand—just getting that glimmer into how they actually are in the classroom. So it's okay to be your real self and your real personality in that teaching demo.

Jasmine (38:54):

So we are very curious, now that we know how teaching demos are evaluated, this idea of an informal rubric. I'm glad I know that now. Have you seen any demos that were particularly memorable?

Gabe (39:11):

Hmm. Yeah. I've seen several that are memorable. One of them, the teacher really just went for it with a kind of a language learning kind of situation where she had all these pieces of colored paper that we were passing around and writing things on and putting an order. And I just kind of forgot that I was in an interview because I was having so much fun doing the thing. As soon as we saw them teach, we were like, yes, this is a great teacher <laugh>

Shelley (39:56):

It's really helpful to hear you say how you forgot you were an interviewer in one of the demos because it was so well done that you just completely adopted the student role. I think that does really show not only that they fully embraced the teacher persona, but they allowed the interviewers to also fully embrace the student persona. So Gabe, you mentioned at the beginning the three demos that you did, and it sounded like those were mostly at the beginning of your career. So those were most likely in person, correct? <affirmative> So something we've seen, one way that teaching demos have evolved just over the last two or three years is that a lot of them have moved online, right?

Gabe (40:40):

Totally.

Shelley (40:40):

Yeah. So the modality has changed a lot. Are there any other ways that you think teaching demos have kind of evolved over these last 15 years that you've done and seen them? Like, how do you think they've changed?

Gabe (40:54):

I think that teaching programs have put more emphasis on student-centered learning over time. And so it's gotten more rare to see somebody do a demo where they're actually not having a student activity. Just people depending on technology a lot, even if it is in-person, has gotten more and more. So, one thing about that, that maybe is in the other tips category, is just that you can't depend on the technology, even on Zoom, you know? You think everyone's gonna know how to use Zoom. And then you just saw when we were setting up for this interview, I had to screen share to have someone help me. That kind of thing happens where people will be like, okay, go type on this Google doc, but then it's like, they didn't give you the right edit link and then everyone's lost, or someone can't find their chat.

Gabe (41:54):

And, so it's just like, <laugh> you can have all your cool technology stuff, but it's always good to have a Plan B lined up. In case someone who is interviewing you, who you think is gonna know how to click on a link in the chat and go do the Flipgrid or whatever you're doing. Maybe they're like, "I don't know how to do this" <laugh> so you have to be like, "Okay, nevermind, I'm doing it this way." And I think that really, even though it's distressing, when that happens, it really shows the candidate's ability to adapt and be flexible. So it's actually a plus if you're interviewers <laugh> have technology problems, and you just come through and you have them learn something anyway. Yeah.

Jasmine (42:49):

So continuing on this, I feel like we're on a journey, right? With the hiring side of this teaching demo. So the teaching demo has happened, and you're ready to do the deliberations. What role does the teaching demo play in the final decision, on whether to hire a candidate or not. Like how much weight does it carry?

Gabe (43:13):

Again, this is N of 1, but for my department, the teaching demo is at least 90% <laugh> By the time the candidate is even in that interview where there's a teaching demo, you know that they have minimum quals, you've already looked at their resume. You know that they have enough experience that you would consider hiring them if their interview goes well. So at that point, unless they had said something egregious in one of the questions and answers, or they just didn't have any idea how to answer the interview questions. It's a very big weight on the

teaching demo. Not to make people more nervous, but again, you don't have to be perfect in the teaching demo, but yeah, because it really shows how they're gonna teach. Yeah.

Jasmine (44:14):

Yeah. Right.

Shelley (44:16):

What tips would you offer to candidates who are doing a teaching demo for the very first time?

Gabe (44:24):

Get the right level, make some interaction between the people with having them do some active learning, bring your best Teaching Self that's full of joy and connection, and treating the students respectfully and being impressed by how smart they are just like real life. Oh, um, stay in character! <laugh> So it's surprising how many people do not stay in character in their teaching demo. So they start the lesson and then they kind of go out of character, and they break the fourth wall, and they do asides, and they start explaining things. So the fifth tip is about the timing. It feels like an impossible ask to do a whole activity in 10 minutes or 15 minutes. And so my advice on this is to think about cooking shows. So, you know how in a cooking show, they already have all the prep things in the little glass bowls?

Gabe (45:34):

Like you're not actually watching them cut up all the onions? Don't make your people watch you cut up all the onions. So, hand them a packet. Or if you're on Zoom, the link in the chat, to the packet where you're like, "Here's the unit we're doing in class, and you already did X and Y last time. Remember Jasmine, that thing that we did last time? You had such a great essay on that or whatever." So you set up, like you have already done all this stuff and you're about to do all this other stuff. And right now we're just focusing on this one thing. So then you go into the thing. So that kind of allows you to kind of get credit for all the other stuff while only doing the show for the little skit which is just the one thing that you're gonna do.

Gabe (46:23):

So you can kind of focus on one thing to have them practice. Number six was technology Plan B, having a backup plan. And then I just wanted to talk a little bit about choosing content. So this is gonna be different for every field, but sometimes there are controversies within a field, and you might have people who are interviewing you, who are really on one side of the controversy. It's gonna be different content in different fields. There's like, in the content or in the way of delivering it where people run the gamut, and they have very strong opinions about how they want someone to do this. So, you know, in English it might be something like some people are really formulaic in the way they teach writing and other people are much more open ended, and like, you never tell students to structure an essay in a certain way because that's being too formulaic and destroying their creativity and whatever.

Gabe (47:51):

And so you don't know who's gonna be on your interview panel and which side they're gonna be on. So this isn't really a clean tip of what to do, but just to consider, maybe picking something that is less controversial, if you have a choice or if you do something where there is controversy about how to teach it or whether something is true in the, in the field. If there's some controversy, because you're applying for an anthropology job and there's approaches in the field that are now considered not good anymore or something like that. Just to do some research and think about how you can show your best self without getting mired in accidentally someone on the hiring panel being like, "Oh I'm not gonna hire them because they said…" You know what I mean?

Gabe ([48:46](#)):

Does that make sense? It's gonna be different in every situation, but if you can find something that's gonna make everyone see how you're a good teacher, then that's great. By the time you set everything up, like the actual thing the people will do with each other is gonna be like five minutes. So make that five minutes count and think of something that's been successful for you in a class, either as a student or as a teacher that will be fun where they'll talk to each other. Well, they'll feel successful. Like they had enough time to finish it. And then to practice would be the last thing, get your friends to do the teaching demo with your friends or with your students if you're teaching.

Jasmine ([49:37](#)):

Awesome. Thank you so much. That was a fantastic list. I just wanted to check in and see if there's any other final comments, things on your mind that you'd like to share since we've been talking about teaching demos.

Gabe ([49:51](#)):

Oh, I don't know if this is really obvious, but so sometimes your interviewers who are pretending to be students will pretend to be kind of difficult students <laugh> Yes <laugh> I can't believe people do that. It's so mean <laugh>

Gabe ([50:16](#)):

Yeah. <affirmative> yeah. That's hard, but just to be aware, that might happen also. Like maybe this is just me and my colleague, like, I don't know if everyone would react that way, but when someone asks you a question that you cannot answer, which also has happened, that actually happened to me in my teaching demo at BCCs <laugh> Someone asked and it was like this like arcane grammar question that I just was like, I don't know! So then I think I said—like I answered it poorly—and then was like… just have a plan B for that. So you can just be like, oh, someone else in the class, like, how about everybody? Look that up, and we'll put it on the Canvas discussion, and whoever answers gets extra credit or something. Like it's okay to not be the perfect authority. You're just demonstrating that you can roll with it, just like you would in real life.

Shelley ([51:13](#)):

I think that's great advice, right? You don't have to be the only source of knowledge in the classroom, right? You're also fighting for students to share. Yeah.

Gabe (51:20):
Exactly. Yeah.

Shelley (51:22):
Well, thank you so much, Gabe. I learned so much. Thank you again for sharing your wisdom on teaching demos with us. Looking forward to talking to you again soon.

Gabe (51:35):
Okay, thanks. Good luck to everyone going into teaching. It's a wonderful joy, and I appreciated the chance to talk with you all.

Shelley (51:54):
Wow, Jasmine, we got some great advice from our two guests today! There's so much to digest. Why don't we go over some of the sprinkles that they highlighted. Jasmine, please tell me what were some of the sprinkles for you?

Jasmine (52:09):
Well, I'm still digesting a lot from what our great interviewees said. One thing that really stuck out to me was this idea of having to incorporate your research into a teaching demo and needing to be prepared for that. And really thinking about what material from, say your dissertation or whatever it is you're working on, is gonna be most appropriate for teaching undergrads. If that's the audience of your teaching demo. Another thing that Nina said that I feel like I wanna write down and put on a sticky note is choose something simple and do it well. Like that really stuck with me. Like it doesn't have to be a whole huge song and dance, you know, a Broadway level performance, just keep it simple and, and do what you do. Well, the last thing that I, I can think of—I'm thinking of Nina's interview specifically—is the idea of this "teaching demo demo," how important it is to practice, really find a group of folks, of audience, of friends or people who support you and practice your teaching demo before you get in there into the actual interview and do it.

Jasmine (53:27):
That's what's on my mind right now. Shelley, what about you?

Shelley (53:31):
Yeah. I completely agree with everything you said, especially the part about keeping it simple and doing it well, especially now that we're doing a lot of teaching demos online, right? Making sure we have a backup plan for technology, but kind of keeping that motto of less is more in the back of our minds and practicing it out. Like you said, making sure we do a teaching demo demo. I really liked Gabe's cooking show analogy, where they talked about how it's important to

kind of chop all your vegetables ahead of time, like you would in a cooking show, making sure you're preparing as much as you can and kind of setting everything up so that you're not spending the time during your short demo, or maybe you have more time depending on the institution, but, um, making sure you're doing as much prep work, right?

Shelley ([54:20](#)):

Like you would in the kitchen, just like we, you know, taking that prep work we do in the kitchen and transferring it to our classrooms to make sure that the time that we spend in our demo is meaningful. Which leads me to kind of…my second takeaway from Gabe is that we should always promote active learning and make sure that there's some meaningful activity or meaningful interaction. Either among the students, if you're doing a demo with real students or among the committee members, if you're in front of a panel, right? So remembering that we are not the center of attention <laugh> in a teaching demo, right? It should be the students <laugh> and I think those are kind of the main sprinkles for me. I'm not sure I have anything else to add.

Jasmine ([55:07](#)):

Same here. I feel like we got some great information here and those were some great sprinkles. Thanks for sharing Shelley!

Shelley ([55:14](#)):

Yes, thank you! Well, Jasmine, I guess that's all. Thank you so much for collaborating with me to host this episode to demystify teaching demos.

Jasmine ([55:26](#)):

Absolutely. I had a great time and I hope our listeners did as well. Shelley, good luck on your teaching demo. That's coming up soon. How do you feel about it?

Shelley ([55:37](#)):

<laugh> I feel much better now! Now that I have all these secrets in my pocket, I'm ready to go. I'm prepared. Hopefully I ace it. I'll let y'all know. Yeah, until our next episode. Bye!

Jasmine! ([55:52](#)):

Bye, Shelley!

Shelley ([55:54](#)):

<laugh>

Jasmine ([56:07](#)):

This podcast was produced by the Teaching Assistant Consultant Fellows at the Center for Educational Effectiveness at UC Davis. It was hosted by Shelley Dykstra and Jasmine Wade and edited by Hannah Nelson and Liz Giardina. Special thanks to our invited guests, Gabriel Winer and Nina Fontana for sharing their wisdom and insights. The Teaching Assistant

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