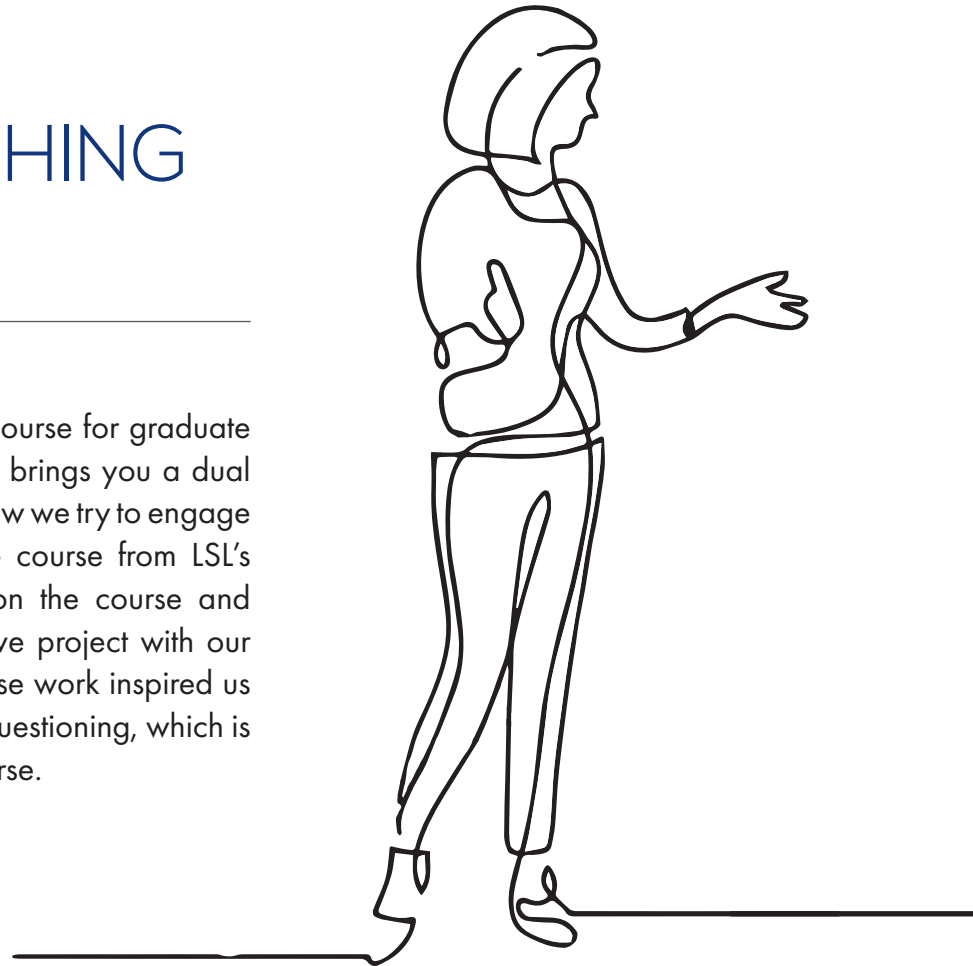


ENGAGING STUDENTS AS PARTNERS IN TEACHING

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The Learning Sciences Lab (LSL) runs a pedagogical course for graduate students to prepare them to teach at SUTD. This article brings you a dual perspective. It gives information about the course, and how we try to engage with our students as partners in teaching beyond the course from LSL's perspective, as well as a graduate student's views on the course and collaboration. This write-up results from a collaborative project with our student, John Chan whose presentation during the course work inspired us to get him and his peer to do a short skit on Socratic Questioning, which is now being used as a teaching resource in the same course.



About The Course

Nacha:

The "Teaching at SUTD: Engaging the Learners" course encompasses 4 lessons and 2 microteaching sessions, totalling 18 hours. The 4 lessons cover aspects such as (1) Educational context at SUTD, (2) Teaching methods to engage students, (3) Questioning skills and (4) Assessing student learning. The microteaching session gives students an opportunity to synthesise what they have learnt during the 4 lessons and design a mini-teaching activity. Each student will showcase their design of learning activity during the microteaching session and provide as well as receive peer feedback. The course infuses several different student-centric and technology enabled learning methods.

John:

The takeaway for me from this course was to have clear learning outcomes to start with and good assessment rubrics to measure learning through out. The learning outcomes provide purpose and structure to a teaching activity. Moreover, the outcomes help me to narrow down relevant topics and emphasize key points so that students can follow during the lesson.

As teaching can subconsciously become more of a presentation than an interaction, I realized that some form of assessment is useful to find out what aspects students have or have not understood from the class. The assessment is two-way; as much as it reflects the student's level of understanding, it also reflects the effectiveness of the teaching, which the teacher can improve on. It also helps to identify gaps in understanding and misconceptions so we can address as teachers.



Why do we need the course for GTAs?

Nacha:

Teaching at SUTD is different in many ways given the unique SUTD pedagogy of multi-disciplinary curriculum, infused with project-based, collaborative, experiential and active learning. Our graduate students come from diverse backgrounds, in terms of nationalities, and have varied prior teaching and learning experiences. Most do not have any prior training on teaching. So it is essential that we prepare them to teach at SUTD and our hope is that this course prepares them for a longer journey ahead as an academic, and not just stop at the teaching assistantship at SUTD.

John:

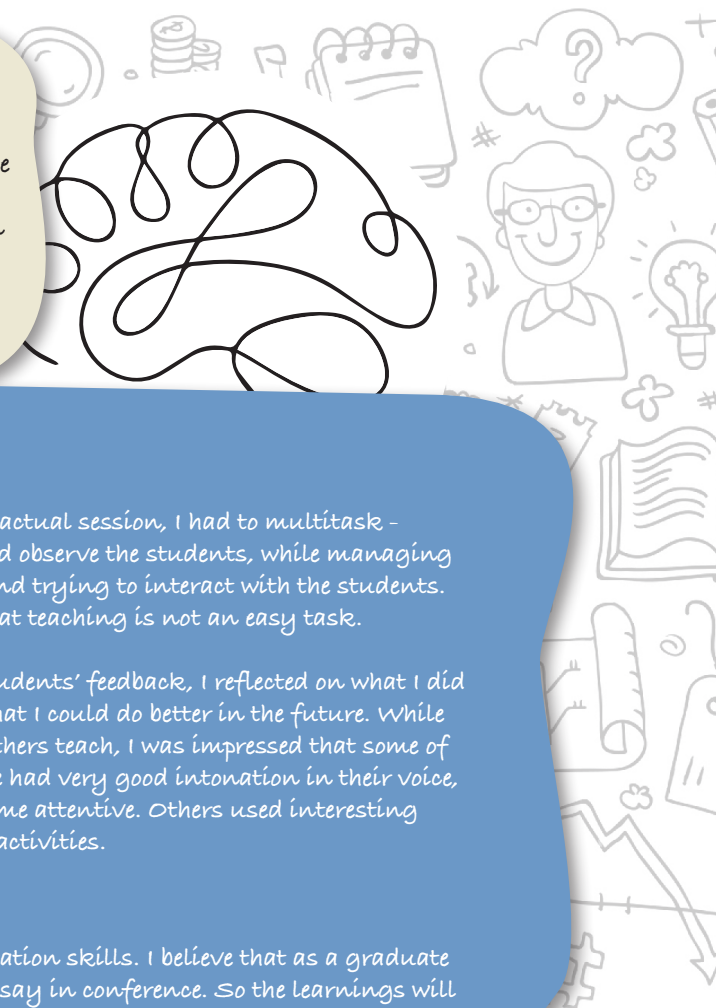
I think that attending the course is sort of fulfilling the university's requirements so that graduate students understand their roles as teaching assistants and are equipped with basic knowledge about teaching methods. It is quite important because we have no prior training.

The microteaching session was a valuable experience for me. I had the opportunity to conduct a short class and also watch others teach and learn from them. When I was put in the shoes of a teacher, I had to plan materials ahead of the class and ponder about how to engage students in class. It made me realize that teaching involves a lot of intentional effort, more than what appears on the surface.

So the course helped me prepare for teaching and improve my presentation skills. I believe that as a graduate student, I will need to present my ideas and interact with audience, say in conference. So the learnings will come in handy.

During the actual session, I had to multitask - monitor and observe the students, while managing the slides and trying to interact with the students. I realised that teaching is not an easy task.

From the students' feedback, I reflected on what I did well and what I could do better in the future. While watching others teach, I was impressed that some of them. Some had very good intonation in their voice, which kept me attentive. Others used interesting interactive activities.



Collaborating with students as partners in teaching

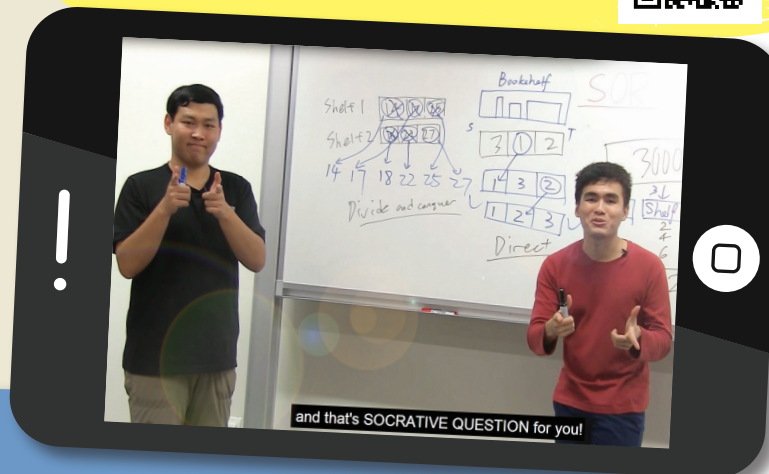
Nacha:

LSL tries to involve our GTAs, staff and faculty members as co-partners in our course in various capacities, as content providers, facilitators and assessors. We find that our graduate students are very enthusiastic, creative and innovative in their teaching as observed during the lessons and microteaching sessions. So when we find interesting and creative ideas, we try and engage them as our student partners.

John and team did a skit on Socratic Teaching to teach programming during one of the lessons. So we invited them back to video-record. Our LSL team and the students worked on the skit and the video production. We use the video as one of the resources in our teaching course.

Check out the video here!

Senior Associate Clement Lim, LSL worked with the students in creating the video and LSL acknowledges the contributions.



John:

I thoroughly enjoyed the co-development, working with another student volunteer and the course instructors on a skit about Socratic questioning. In this skit, I took on the role of a teacher whose objective was to convey the concept of sorting algorithms to the student.

Instead of using a conventional lecture style, the teacher would engage the student by asking leading questions, helping the student to think deeper and discover their answers. The course instructors provided feedback on the skit and acting, and video-recorded the sessions.

Through the co-development experience, I could apply knowledge learnt from the course and this also gave me ample practice for future teaching.

Furthermore, it helped me to discover that there is so much more to teaching than what a course can cover, such as responding to changing situational nuances, which comes with experience.