Reflecting on the outcomes of the Durham teaching skills programme

A perspective from a recent PhD student in the Durham physics department
Presented by Daniel Bright
29th Feb 2012

Overview

• Context
• Postgraduate Demonstrator Training Programme
• Durham University Learning and Teaching Award
• Reflections on each, and overall experiences
Context

PhD student in physics starting October 2007
- Photophysics of fluorescent polymers
PG Demonstrator training October 2008
Laboratory demonstration L3 nuclear physics labs
- October 2008-March 2011 (6 terms x 8wks x 6hrs)
DULTA 2010-2011
Completed PhD June 2011 -> Post-doc in organic solar cells
Continuing PD demonstrator L3 condensed matter labs
- October 2011-March 2012

Training in Postgraduate
Demonstrating and Marking

Compulsory training for all postgraduates about to undertake teaching
duties in any capacity – but not specific to physics
Split into several sections – one core course for all, and then separate
days focusing on either demonstrating or marking
Two-day event in total, including interactive group discussions and
example videos
Given by external teaching staff – specialists, engaging and entertaining,
impurred important knowledge and approaches

Durham University
Reflection

Extremely important course to instil the importance of engagement and questioning, not passivity and answer-dropping.

Felt too brief in total – would have preferred a further session within L3 labs focusing on specifics of immediate environment.

Initially felt in the same boat as the students.

Demonstrating improved greatly in the second term as familiarity provided confidence.

Durham University Learning and Teaching Award

In-depth course of lectures, seminars and coursework spread over many weeks, culminating in a self-analytical and reflective report.

High level of detail and conceptual knowledge leading on to examples and applications within the teaching environment – practising the preaching.

Concepts behind good teaching:

• Teaching and supporting student learning
• Effective, objective assessment and feedback
• Integrating scholarship and research into teaching
• Evaluation of practice

Coursework: self-analysis and description of own teaching as each subject was covered --> strong sense of involvement.
Reflection

Instilled a great sense of **confidence** and **conceptual understanding** that was previously lacking

– Could feel the influence of it during the demonstrating I did concurrently and since

The course content of reflective writing and self-analysis has made it one of the most important and influential courses I have ever attended

I feel far more prepared, so teaching can be fun!

Overall Experiences

Other smaller courses offered to postgraduates, such as time management and thesis writing

The demonstrator training and DULTA courses were excellent

A departmental-specific introduction to L3 demonstrators

– specific details of staff allocations and labs, and a quick “gist” of being proactive and engaging with the students

- The initial introductory course set me off in approximately the right direction.
- The most significant improvements in my demonstrating came from increasing depth of experience, and the DULTA course
Thank you for your attention

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