



## ARTICLE

# Teach It In Five—Putting The “Teaching Effect” To Use In The Classroom

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## I. An Idea Is Born

Recently I have become intrigued with the idea that students learn best from teaching materials themselves. Indeed, when I reflect on situations in which I have learned and retained material, it has involved me learning material and then teaching it to another person. For example, when I was starting out as a legal writing professor, I took the rules of grammar for granted, knowing them but having long since forgotten the rationale behind them. When I taught one summer in Germany, however, my students wanted a detailed explanation of the rules, and so I was put in a situation where I had to learn the rules and then teach them to my eager pupils. Almost a decade later, I can still rattle off the difference between an em-dash and a hyphen without blinking an eye. It wasn't the learning that made the information stick for good—it was the teaching.

I have been trying to come up with ways that I can incorporate this concept into my own classroom. While PowerPoint can be a very effective teaching tool,<sup>1</sup> I felt that there must be another way in. I tried new methods, including the flipped

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah Jones Merritt, *Legal Education in the Age of Cognitive Science and Advanced Classroom Technology*, 14 B.U. J. SCI. & TECH L. 39, 50-66 (2008)(outlining the effective use of PowerPoint in the law school classroom).

classroom technique,<sup>2</sup> which has been very successful. I also started to have my students work in teams, and I was soon converted to the many benefits of this model.<sup>3</sup> As I reflected on the successes of these approaches, I realized that they led to situations in which the students were doing less listening and more talking in the classroom.<sup>4</sup> I began to cast about for ways in which I could do more of the same to improve the learning experience for the students.

The idea that I decided to implement stemmed from the concept of the “teaching effect,” or learning by teaching.<sup>5</sup> Obviously, I don’t have enough time to teach an entire semester’s worth of material and then have each student teach it back to me. Instead, I needed to come up with a reasonable way for students to learn distinct concepts and then teach them to me. I began to read scholarship in the area of Psychology and learned that there is solid research to back up my anecdotal experience.<sup>6</sup> In fact, one article noted that students who learned about a previously unfamiliar topic and then produced a five-minute instructional video learned the information more effectively than students who only re-studied or wrote about the topic.<sup>7</sup> Five minutes? That sounded like a reasonable amount of time to me, and so the idea of “Teach It In Five” was born.

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<sup>2</sup> Alex Berrio Matamoros, *Answering the Call: Flipping the Classroom to Prepare Practice-Ready Attorneys*, 43 CAP. U. L. REV. 113, 118 (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Melissa H. Weresh, *Uncommon Results: The Power of Team-Based Learning in the Legal Writing Classroom*, 19 LEGAL WRITING: J. OF THE LEGAL WRITING INST. 49, 79 (2014) (noting that using the team-based learning approach led to “improvement in student preparation and engagement. . . [and] a demonstrable improvement on ungraded assignments”).

<sup>4</sup> Sophie M. Sparrow & Margaret Sova McCabe, *Team-Based Learning in Law*, 18 LEGAL WRITING: J. OF THE LEGAL WRITING INST. 153, 197-98 (2012) (in team-based learning, “the professor’s job is to facilitate the discussion and help students uncover the learning”); Matamoros, *supra* note 2, at 118 (“A flipped classroom . . . has two defining features: (1) students independently engage with new instructional material before a class session at a time and place of their choosing, ordinarily via the Internet; and (2) classroom time is primarily spent working on active learning experiences or projects, often in small groups, with the instructor available to provide guidance and answer questions.”).

<sup>5</sup> Aloysius Wei Lun Koh, Sze Chi Lee & Stephen Wee Hun Lim, *The Learning Benefits of Teaching: A Retrieval Practice Hypothesis*, 32 APPLIED COGNITIVE PSYCHOL. 401, 401(2018).

<sup>6</sup> Peter A. Cohen, James A. Kulik & Chen-Lin C. Kulik, *Educational Outcomes of Tutoring: A Meta-Analysis of Findings*, 19 AM. EDUC. RESEARCH J. 237, 247 (1982)(finding that “tutoring benefits both the tutors and tutees on both the cognitive and affective levels”); Logan Fiorella & Richard E. Mayer, *The Relative Benefits of Learning by Teaching and Teaching Expectancy*, 38 CONTEMP. EDUC. PSYCHOL., 281, 287 (2013)(“On the practical level, the current study provides support for the idea that large improvements in student understanding can be achieved through engaging in a basic teaching task.”); Vincent Hoogerheide, et al., *Gaining from Explaining: Learning Improves from Explaining to Fictitious Others on Video, Not from Writing to Them*, 44-45 CONTEMP. EDUC. PSYCHOL., 95, 104 (2016)(“[T]his study showed that explaining to fictitious others on video can be an effective learning activity compared to restudy. . .”).

<sup>7</sup> Fiorella & Mayer, *supra* note 6, at 287 (summarizing a study that concluded that “considerable learning gains were found even when students were only asked to provide a very short (i.e., less than 5 minute) video-recorded lecture of the material”).

## 2. Lights, Camera, Action!

The challenge that I wished to address was to ensure that students were learning the basic black letter law for their spring writing assignment, which is a persuasive brief. Since the spring semester is the first time that students are doing research themselves, the process can seem overwhelming to them (and sometimes to me). Usually I sit down with each team for a pre-draft conference to check in with them about their research before they turn in the first draft of their briefs. This year, I added an additional intermediary exercise: Teach It In Five. Students, working together in a team, created a video that explained the relevant law to me, which happened to be associational standing. There were two restrictions: 1) the video could be no longer than five minutes long; and 2) the students could spend no more than one hour creating the video.<sup>8</sup> I provided instructions on how to upload a video using the University software, which is very user-friendly, and a link to a how-to website that our IT department provided. If such software had not been available, students could easily have shared videos using their smartphones or other devices. I also explained that students did not need to appear on screen for the video—it would be perfectly acceptable to create a PowerPoint presentation and narrate it.

## 3. And the Oscar goes to . . .

With this simple exercise, everyone is a winner. The students were, of course, the primary beneficiaries. While I feared that students might complain about the extra work that went into creating the video, I realized that this generation makes videos with the same ease that a Gen-Xer like me writes an email. There was not one complaint, and the videos were of a very high quality. For some teams, the students appeared together on camera and taught the material. Other groups divided the work: one team member wrote the script, another created the PowerPoint slides, and another read the script on camera. The pressure on the students was low because I was the only viewer, and the assignment was graded on a pass/fail basis.

On my end, there was relatively little work for a high reward. In terms of my effort, I reviewed each video and gave feedback on each assignment. Because I am

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<sup>8</sup> I put these restrictions in place both for the sake of the students and for me. I did not want students to spend hours laboring over creating a video with Hollywood production values, thus missing the point of the exercise. I also knew that five minutes was sufficient, and I didn't want to create an undue burden on myself by not putting a time limit on the video. There was, of course, no way to monitor whether the students complied with the first requirement (time spent on production), but I trusted them to follow instructions. The second (length of the video) was, of course, simple to enforce.

familiar with the topic, I was able to do so quickly, typing my comments directly into the course website where they had uploaded their videos. It took me approximately ten minutes to review and comment on each video. The main benefit was that I learned where the gaps in knowledge were, and I was able to encourage students to move their research in a particular direction.

Perhaps most importantly, I found the quality of the drafts they turned in to be much higher than I typically expect for a first draft. For example, when I have taught associational standing in the past, the students struggled with the structure of the brief, which was not a significant issue with these drafts. Furthermore, students identified and analyzed issues at a more nuanced level than I had seen in prior drafts. In general, the drafts, while still far from perfect, were at a more advanced stage than previous first drafts I have read on the subject. I believe this progress was a result of the additional opportunity I had to check in on students before they submitted their first draft and provide feedback to move them along in the process.

In addition to meeting the immediate goals of the assignment, the assignment met some of the broader goals of the students' education. For example, it served as a method of formative assessment.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, this exercise is ideal because it involves what Elizabeth Bloom describes in her terrific article on the topic as a "low-stakes opportunit[y to assess] beginning early in the course."<sup>10</sup> It was also a chance to present material in an oral format, allowing students to develop a core competency that law schools must include in their learning outcomes.<sup>11</sup> It was also one more project for the teams to work together to create a product. As noted above, the benefits of teamwork are well established.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4. Will there be a sequel?

Going forward, I intend to continue to utilize the Teach It In Five method, making adjustments as I go. For our next assignment, which involves an issue of statutory interpretation, I have created an exercise in which the students will create a video directed at the client. The student is to explain the arguments that will appear in the brief to the client, pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of each argument. The requirements from the first assignment—the video must not exceed five minutes in length and the amount of time creating the video cannot be longer than one hour—are still in place. I have, however, also added a new requirement: students are not to read from a script during the video. They may refer to notes,

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth M. Bloom, *A Law School Game Changer: (Trans)formative Feedback*, 41 OHIO N. UNIV. L. REV. 227, 232 (2015) ("formative assessment includes feedback, which is occurring as learning is developing for the purpose of helping to improve a student's capability").

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 250.

<sup>11</sup> AM. BAR ASS'N STANDARDS AND RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL OF LAW SCHOOLS (2019-20), Standard 302(b).

<sup>12</sup> Weresh, *supra* note 3, at 79; Sparrow & McCabe, *supra* note 4, at 162.

but they cannot simply read a document to the camera. I added this requirement after reading an article that found that students are more likely to retain information when they do not rely on notes during the presentation itself.<sup>13</sup>

As for other uses, there are many. For example, in the fall, the exercise could be used to reinforce newly acquired skills, such as writing a rule illustration or the application portion of a memorandum.<sup>14</sup> It could also be used to help students learn concepts such as citation or grammar rules. Indeed, Teach It In Five need not be limited to the legal writing classroom. As noted above, the exercise is an easy, flexible way to do a formative assessment, which is something we are all wanting (and needing) to incorporate into our classrooms.<sup>15</sup> In some forms, it could even satisfy the requirements of experiential learning.<sup>16</sup>

One of the main challenges I need to address is how to maximize learning potential, while not adding too much of a burden to the instructor. The ideal situation is one in which I teach the material, the students absorb it, prepare their own class, and then record the video. Doing so would increase their ability to retain the material, in addition to providing me with one more opportunity for feedback. On the instructor’s end, however, that adds quite a bit of work—there’s no need for a calculator to figure out that reviewing and providing feedback on forty videos would take significantly more time and effort than doing the same for twelve videos. It’s possible that this exercise would work well in an upper-level course with fewer students, or in an academic achievement program.

There is much left to explore, and I’m excited to find even more opportunities to use the Teach It In Five method in my classroom.

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<sup>13</sup> Koh et al., *supra* note 5, at 407 (“in order to insure that students and tutors learn and retain the educational material that they have prepared and presented in class, they ought to internalize the to-be presented material prior to communicating it to an audience, rather than rely on study notes during the presentation process”).

<sup>14</sup> This exercise would work well in a traditional classroom, an online course, or a hybrid of the two.

<sup>15</sup> *Supra* note 11, Standard 314 (“A law school shall utilize both formative and summative assessment methods in its curriculum to measure and improve student learning and provide meaningful feedback to students.”).

<sup>16</sup> *Supra* note 11, Standard 304(b) (“A simulation course provides substantial experience not involving an actual client, that is reasonably similar to the experience of a lawyer advising or representing a client or engaging in other lawyering tasks in a set of facts and circumstances devised or adopted by a faculty member.”).