

# CHANGING STRATEGIES IN TEACHING FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

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## Abstract

Many educators have been using the same teaching and learning strategies regardless of what generation is in their classrooms. Most of our classrooms' groups are composed of members of Generation Z and some millennials. The newer generation of students has unique characteristics and expectations, especially since they were born alongside technological and communication boosts that shaped every learning aspect. This generation is likely to be more social, mobile-oriented, global, digital, entrepreneurial, experiential, and visual, among other Generation Z traits. This conceptual paper aims to share the active-learning activity planning and use of technology in a first-year course with this information in mind and with a co-teaching methodology. The course under review exposes students to explore and reflect on the current economic situation of Puerto Rico and the potential alternatives for the future, serve as a guide for personal budget planning, and supports students in developing a personal brand as a strategy for their professional development. This course is a requisite for students from the Business Development Program and an elective for students from music, communication, judicial systems, and other majors.

Keywords: competencies, team-teaching, technology, active-learning.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Many educators have been using the same teaching and learning strategies regardless of what generation is in their classrooms. Most of our classrooms' groups are composed of members of Generation Z and some millennials. The newer generation (born between 1996 and 2012) of students has unique characteristics and expectations, especially since they were born alongside technological and communication boost that shaped every aspect of learning. Generation Z is more likely to be more social, mobile-oriented, global, digital, entrepreneurial, experiential, and visual. With this information in mind, two professors have been applying, optimizing, and reflecting on the use of different teaching and learning strategies for a first-year course that they have been co-teaching for the last two years. This course exposes students to explore and reflect on the current economic situation of Puerto Rico and the potential alternatives for the future. The course continues with tools on the importance of personal finance and supports students in developing a personal brand as a strategy for their professional development.

The professors shared their knowledge, creativity, and passion for creating an active-learning teaching approach in the classroom and transforming the learning experience into consideration the competencies. Activities and strategies involving active learning are role-playing, project-based learning, discussion-based learning, problem-solving learning, challenge-based learning, think-pair-share, assessment with immediate feedback, and a team teaching environment in a remote learning environment, and with COVID-19.

The course, From Macroeconomics to Personal Branding, which began in the fall of 2018, was designed for the Business Development program students and responded to the institution's vision in integrating concepts and topics that are not usually discussed together or in the same class. However, they are also necessary for the development of entrepreneurial ability. Most are first-year students of this study concentration, yet the course has taken a boost, and more and more, we have students of music, natural sciences, public relations, advertising, theatre, events, tourism, accounting, among other concentrations.

Also, when deciding about the learning strategies and activities, the professors took into consideration these competencies for the 21st century: emotional intelligence, ability to influence peers, active listening, communication skills, creative problem-solving, critical thinking.

The objectives of this paper are:

- 1 To present transformative learning activities through competencies.
- 2 To show active learning activities used in a virtual remote environment.
- 3 To share our experience.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This paper presents a mixed research approach using action-research and students' surveys as the methodologies. This approach allowed both professors to reflect and assess their teaching, the learning activities, and the technology used in the course.

An action-research is a qualitative research methodology that allows researchers to observe, compile data, analyze, interpret and implement in a cyclical form changes to improve educators' and students' teaching-learning experience [1]. Richardson [2] viewed action-research as a way for teachers to answer questions that incite their curiosity. One of the crucial aspects of this research methodology is that the reflection becomes intentional and systematic [1]. In addition, this methodology promotes the interaction between the researcher and the participants.

The cycling nature of action research-requires teachers to [3][5]:

- 1 Select a focus or problem statement.
- 2 Collect data.
- 3 Analyze and interpret the data.
- 4 Design an action-research plan.
- 5 Take action.
- 6 Reflect.
- 7 Continue or modify actions.

Each cycle requires data collecting and re-designing the action plan, if necessary. The last step leads to the identification of a new focus or problem, and the cycle begins again.

The second research methodology used was to apply a students' survey at the end of the semester. The survey used in the course has a mix of closed and open-ended questions using Google Forms. The questions are:

- 1 3 things I learned in class.
- 2 2 important details of the class.
- 3 1 question I still have on a class topic.
- 4 From 1 to 10, what was your understanding of the topics discussed during the class.
- 5 How the course topics can be used in your life?
- 6 If I were the professor, what would I do or what would I change in the class.
- 7 Would you recommend this course to your peers?

A mixed research approach gives a broad and profound understanding of the subject under study [5]. In this case, both methodologies give a collection of opinions, attitudes, and reflections on professors and students. This also provides a comprehensive, holistic view and a complete understanding [5] of the class experience.

## 3 RESULTS

This paper presents the main research findings from 2018 to 2020. The professors took the time to observe and compile data for the design of an action plan. The plan includes learning outcomes, followed by strategies and active-learning activities. The action plan also considers the 21st-century competencies: emotional intelligence, ability to influence peers, active listening, communication skills, creative problem-solving, critical thinking, which the university recently added as transversal skills. Also, the professors considered the technology available and that the course is taught in an online setting. Because of the COVID-19 the course for fall 2020 has incorporated the following activities:

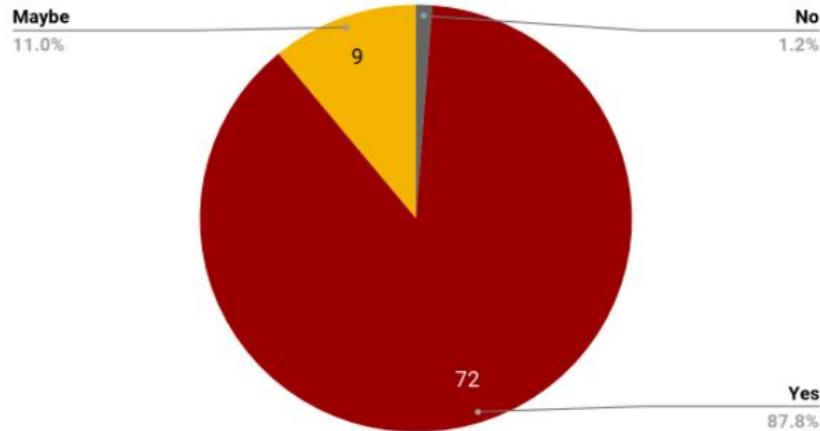
- 1 The Podcast and the video resume are activities that are great examples of active learning, collaborative work, and the creation of multimedia and multi-platforms projects. The Podcast is a different way for the students to interact, acquire and practice team building skills, it can help them gain confidence and literacy on the subject, and it gives a different narrative to the traditional oral report or a class presentation. Communication skills are developed, and team building, organizational skills, research, and content creation. The video resume is a short video in which students introduce themselves to a recruiter, investor, mentor or to other students and teachers, for example for the first day of class introductions. It is not new to do video resumes, but for this generation and because of the new pandemic reality, it is going to be very common for our students to make this type of videos. Doing this they can use their creativity and emotional intelligence. Before sending the final video, they have the opportunity to practice with each other and the fill-out a rubric where they give advice on how to improve the presentation.
- 2 The dashboard and Vision board are examples of discussion-based and project-based learning methodologies. The dashboard allows students to discuss their topics in groups and describe the problem using data. For the dashboard, students have to be very precise with the data collection because of the limited space in a dashboard; they have to curate the data and use graphs and tables to present the data. Critical thinking is developed, in addition to quantitative skills and data visualization. The vision board allows students to communicate to themselves and others their brand using images, colors, textures, and words. Creativity is expressed doing the vision board. Besides, a Peer-to-Peer review of the vision board is used to build on their emotional intelligence. In both activities (dashboard and vision board), they learn using interactive technology, which develops digital literacy.
- 3 The flipped classroom allows for more class participation. Students have to read at their own time in advance and come to class to interact through the different active learning activities incorporated. The course has videos, short readings, self-study activities, discussion forums, and short exercises and quizzes. All of these are incorporated to increase independent learning, self-evaluation, curiosity, and lifelong learning skills.
- 4 Social media and current events are also employed in class. They are required to tweet using class hashtags. Tweeting in class is an activity that students enjoy a lot because they love talking about current events discussed in class on social media. Also, students have to communicate their ideas, knowledge, and observations with the use of memes. Memes are used as a social composition of what they are experiencing as learners related to the class topics and promote creativity and critical thinking. Students do digital audits of their brand and then design a content calendar to start to use social media to communicate their brand strategically. This promotes creativity, self-awareness, and digital identity. The course also requires them to have their LinkedIn profile.
- 5 The use of mobile devices is encouraged throughout the semester. All course content and activities can be seen and done using mobile devices. This promotes digital literacy and engagement, especially during this pandemic time. Some of the tools or apps that students use to do the active learning activities are Canva, Infogram, Nearpod, Pear Deck, Kahoot, Flipgrid, and Padlet, among other available technology.

The end of semester students' survey has provided important information that has helped improve course content and activities. Since August 2018 (fall semester), the survey has been administered and has a response rate of fifty-one percent. For example, the survey asked if they would recommend the course to other students. As shown in Graph 1., 87.8 percent said they would recommend the course.

## Results 1.

Would you recommend this course to your peers?

n=82



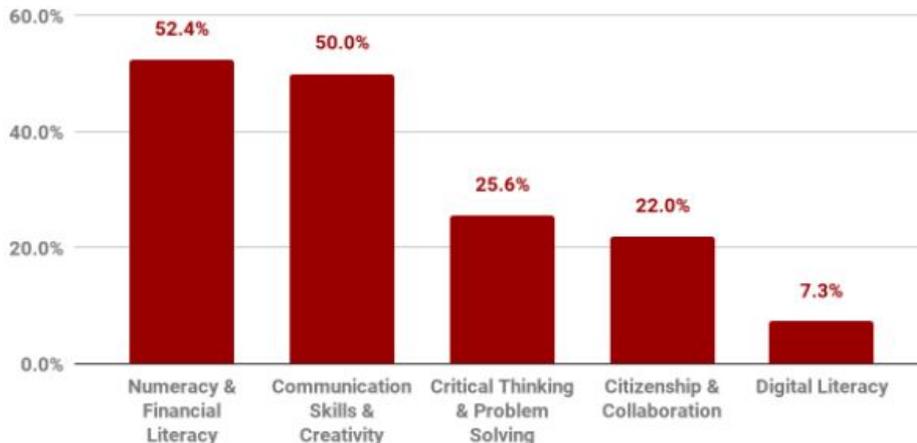
Graph 1. Recommendation of course.

Furthermore, students are asked how the course topics can be used in their lives. 52.4 percent indicated that the course topics would be used in numeral and financial literacy, 50 percent would use communication skills and creativity, 25.6 percent in critical thinking and problem solving, 22 percent in citizenship and collaboration, and 7.3 % in digital literacy (See Graph 2.).

## Results 2.

How the course topics can be used in your life?

n=82



Graph 2. Use of topics.

## 4 MODEL: GOALS, RESULTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, ACTIONS, STEPS, AND SCHEDULE (GRRASS)

The model GRRASS (See Figure 1.) emerged as part of the reflection and presented for the first time at the 2019 Faculty Network Symposium [4]. The model serves as a starting point to incorporate or modify the action plan. This model allows teachers in a team-teaching approach to discuss their reflections, ideas, and concerns and help in the decision-making process and implement and assess changes or improvements. For example,

Goals: What the professors want to accomplish?

Results: What must students learn or accomplish?

Responsibilities: What roles or responsibilities each faculty member has?

Actions: What actions and activities the teachers will perform, and in what order, to move towards the desired outcomes?

Standards (guides): What guides will be applied during the planning?

Schedule: How much time is available to complete the changes, activities, or evaluations?

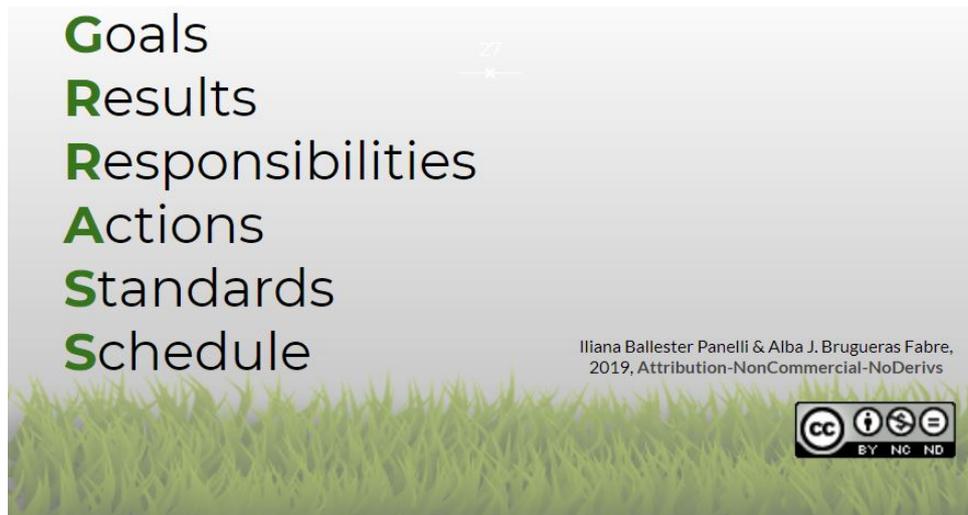


Figure 1. GRRASS Model.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

The employed methodology, action-research, and surveys brought an understanding of students' learning experiences. The research cycle never ends, yet some of the reflection processes have served to continuously improve the course, especially in pandemic times. Students and faculty expectations are no longer incompatible in an online classroom setting. The virtual classroom is optimized to achieve the learning outcomes using technological tools, active learning activities, and action-research.

Action-research is an on-going process; although, at the time of the current cycle, the recommendations are:

- 1 To engage the students with meaningful activities.
- 2 To plan and practice the virtual activities.
- 3 To tell students why they are learning the concepts they are learning and why they are doing the activity they are doing.

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