

GRACE TEO: I will say that one of the things that I used be pretty insecure about as an educator-- to put this in context, I just graduated with my Ph.D. over the summer. And after spending five years working on one niche problem, you're like, all right, well I don't have a lot of usable skills, I just have a lot of knowledge about this one tiny problem. What can I possibly teach? And so I used to think about that a lot.

But something this class showed me was that actually just the ability to be entrepreneurial, the ability to be adaptable, the ability to be a facilitator, a communicator, mediator between people-- which I think were all huge parts of this class-- was the most important thing in being an educator here. So it wasn't so much about knowledge of subject material, or knowledge of a specific skill, but just the ability to facilitate learning, which a lot of times just comes down to knowing how to ask the right questions of what is needed at this moment to help my student learn and succeed, and being able to answer their questions.

So I didn't need to know the knowledge. I didn't need to have the skills. But I just needed to know where to find that knowledge and skills and be able to bring my student to that place.

WILLIAM LI: Yeah, wow. So I think this is a challenging question to answer, what I learned in terms of teaching or being an educator. One thing I'd say-- so I'm currently a Ph.D. Student. And so this semester, as a graduate instructor. It was a little bit unexpected certainly, to be involved in teaching the course this semester. And to try to carry on and extend the work that Seth Teller had done in this class was to me, personally a very monumental undertaking. Seth was my master's thesis adviser, and I worked on assistive technology with him and saw him teach the class the first time, and gone to some of the classes and helped out a little bit in the last two years or three years as well. So to suddenly be a co-instructor of the class with Grace was a sudden, almost kind of jarring experience. A baptism of fire, perhaps.

So maybe there's three things to say. One is, it was immensely challenging. It is different from doing research, which is mostly what I'm doing as a Ph.D. student. Even working on projects with different people, you sort of have this one level removed, where suddenly-- as Grace was talking about-- working with students, and trying to encourage them in certain directions. And there's certainly some uncertainty associated with that. Or whether they will take your advice, I guess, or whether you should nudge them further in this direction. Or sometimes they surprise you. Very often, frankly, they surprise you. Very pleasantly, in terms of what they're able to

accomplish over the semester. So how to inspire or mentor students is really something that I learned over the semester.

I think a part of this is that it was pretty emotional. Maybe that's the right word. In terms of the history of this class, the very personal nature of it. I think we got to know our 35 students very well over the semester, and certainly the clients as well, the 11 clients that we worked with. And so you really experience the ups and downs with the students over the course of the projects. And that's challenging sometimes, or interesting to experience.

I think the third thing I'd say is that it was, in the end, very rewarding, to see the results, and see students excited about what they had done. To be able to work with a really great team of people all passionate about the course. So co-instructors, and our teaching and lab assistants who had taken the class before and really wanted to make this a positive experience for students. I think in a lot of senses, this is pretty unprecedented. I don't know if I will ever do anything like this again for a fairly long time, I guess in terms of the meaningfulness and the challenge and the personal side of it. I might be waxing poetic. But I think it was really exciting to be able to put something like this together.

And for that matter, I think it's one reason to try to share our full experience really. The things that worked, and things that maybe didn't work as well on something like OCW. Warts and all, I suppose, in terms of what we tried, and what was successful, and what guidelines we might have to other educators. So I think really the focus of our class, or if we've delivered a good class this semester and provided a good learning experience for our students, and our students have learned and taken away something from Principles and Practice of Assistive Technology this semester, then I think that's what we set out to do. If we can inspire educators and students elsewhere, who might be interested in assistive technology, or working in this space, if we can kind of let 1,000 flowers bloom when it comes to assistive technology or the work that we're doing, then maybe we've done our job this semester.