

## **Reflective Essay on Teaching Experience**

### **Individual Essay**

Like most of my peers, I joined the teaching profession with some preconceived notions, to a certain extent based on observations of my teachers, both good and bad, and partly on my opinion of how things should be like in a perfect world.

### **Personal Philosophy**

#### **Every child having a sense of belonging**

As a child, I have good memories of my experience and education in primary school. I study at an all-girls school where corporal punishment was still used to punish disobedient pupils. I remember that my language teacher who was also the discipline teacher was very strict, but I also remember that I respected her to a great deal and so do most of my peers. I felt that in a way this had formed my initial notion about teaching where teachers are respected and should maintain a level of control in the classroom. However, I am glad that we have progressed from corporal punishment as a way to maintain order in our classrooms. There are many other ways in which the teachers can gain their students' respect and keep their classrooms orderly. I believe that it is important for me to show genuine care for my pupils through the way I teach and, in the time, I devote to my pupils. I believe this kind of caring nature is bound to positively affect the pupils. I believe it is also important for me to create a positive atmosphere where pupils are encouraged to discuss questions. Pupils should not be afraid of making mistakes as they are treated as opportunities to explore misconceptions and not reflection of their abilities. School being their second home, it is important that my classroom is a place where it is safe for them to make mistakes, a place where differences are tolerated and compromised on.

Common sense and research tell us that students are more likely to cooperate with teachers whom they see as caring, trustworthy, and respectful (Weinstein, 2006 as cited in Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011). It is important to develop a supportive and respectful relationship with pupils not only to gain cooperation but also for them to be seriously engaged in learning, to share their thoughts and feelings, to take risks and to develop a sense of social responsibility. Thus, I need organize my classroom in such a way that my pupils will feel safe and cared for emotionally, intellectually and physically. I remembered conducting the 'Heart-to-heart' session with my pupils during my contract teaching and I find this very useful in getting to know the pupils better. Also, pupils were tasked to write at least one journal entry every week on something special. These activities have helped me to know my pupils better and are a great stepping stone to improve the teacher-student relationship. Thus, I hope to continue to implement them in my class in the future.

#### **Focus on Students' Strengths**

What really triggers me to join the teaching profession was the weekly tuition session I volunteered for during my university days and continued to this day. Working for a non-profit community organization gave me the best experience in social interaction and interpersonal skills that I would have not learnt of. I hoped my experiences and encouragement would help them find a clearer path to their interests in life and work, but I found that I learned so much from them about bravery, tolerance and ambition to succeed. It is really heart-warming to know that the boys are grateful for the help and support of volunteers and love to engage in learning and games. This gave me

a completely new view of life, communities and education. There's no doubt that I found great satisfaction in sharing and encouraging the boys but I was surprised by how enlightening and fulfilling the whole experience was. Thus, I believe that it is important for me to develop their full potential by guiding them in their route of discovery. As children are our future, it is crucial for me to allow them to express their opinions and nurture their own ideas. These reasons confirmed my decision that teaching was what I want to do in life.

At times, we need to tap into the life experiences of our pupils to discover what they can do beyond their academic achievements. As a teacher, I used to focus on what my pupils do not know or cannot do, and try to fix the problems. However, after going through the teaching experience and courses in NIE, I learned that responsible teaching also involves searching for strengths. This is important to develop the confidence and self-competency of my pupils (Lim, Thaver, & Slee, 2008). I will need to create opportunities for pupils to succeed while challenging them. I was told that we need to scaffold for pupils to understand the concept better but little did I know that these small successes will also lead to increased pupils' confidence.

### **Engaged and Active Learning**

During my contract teaching stint, I learnt that each and every individual student in the class had a different background and there is a great diversity in there. Each student had their unique learning style and abilities. Their family backgrounds ranged from lower to the top tier of society. I learnt that different stakeholders, i.e. parents, school, child and teacher, all play a part in nurturing students. The socio-economic class of students affected their abilities and academic success, and different family structures gave different levels of support. All these differences made me understand that when conducting lessons, I cannot expect all students to have the same experiences. Learning is superficial unless the pupils are actively engaged. Therefore, I will need to use different teaching strategies in my class such as questioning, collaborative learning, hands-on activities and experiential learning events that will encourage active and constructive learning.

However, conducting a class that actively engages the pupils require a lot of planning. Therefore, I need to ensure that I am well prepared by not only knowing the content knowledge but also the teaching objectives and strategies. The activities planned will also need to match the concepts, skills and goals of the lesson. When pupils are actively engaged, they focus on what is being taught and better process new information (Lorain, 2010). As pointed out by Tom Good and Jere Brophy (2008), when students must wait with nothing to do, there is a higher probability to result in undesirable behavior and a loss of valuable learning opportunities (Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011). Through the various courses in NIE, I have learned how to better prepare myself for lesson and designing activities that are able to develop pupils' relational understanding. This course also discusses various cooperative learning strategies such as think-pair-share, round table, and jigsaw which I could apply in my classroom to promote active learning. Also, to ensure that the group activities are carried out successfully, I need to ensure that there are certain classroom rules and routines to keep the classroom running smoothly.

### **My Evolution as a Teacher-in-Training**

#### **Establishing Productive Learning Environment**

One concept taught in this course that struck me most was the model for creating an inclusive learning environment which was adapted from Stice's problem-solving model. This model helps me to understand and reaffirm some of the teaching practices which I have observed and learned during my teaching internship, relief teaching or contract teaching. The model aims to aid classroom learning environment that are not only academically inclusive but also socially.

Creating a conducive physical environment can influence the way teachers and students feel, think and behave (Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011). Thus, it is important for me to ensure that the physical furniture in my class are strategically arranged to suit the needs of the pupils. During my contract teaching, my teacher mentor created a reading corner at the back of her class with carpets and cushions for the pupils. I find this arrangement useful in managing the class. Once the pupils have completed the assigned work, they will proceed to the reading corner with a book and read silently. I felt that this has helped to inculcate in the pupils the love for reading. This also helps her manage the class and reduce unnecessary disruption when the pupils have completed their work. Occasionally on a rotationally basis, pupils are given 10 minutes break time where they are allowed to use the educational board games created. This encourages pupils' self-directed learning as they explore different concepts in a fun and interactive manner. I have also learned that it is important to ensure that the notice boards are up-to-date with information and pupil's work. Environment psychologists point out that the effects of the classroom environment can be both direct and indirect (Proshansky & Wolfe, 1974 as cited in Weinstein, Romano, & Mignano, 2011). For example, if pupils seated in straight rows are unable to carry on a class discussion because they can't hear one another, the environment is directly hindering their participation. Students may also be affected indirectly if they infer from the seating arrangement that the teacher does not really want them to interact. Therefore, I need to be mindful on how my pupils are arranged in the class as it will send a message to them about how they are supposed to behave due to the link between classroom environment and student behavior.

Through this course, I also learned that it is important to create a sense of belonging for the pupils by providing them opportunities to make decision on how they want the classroom to be such as giving them the responsibility to decorate the class or as simple as putting up pupils work.

### **Behavior Management**

Another aspect which I find very useful is the various behavior management models which teachers could employ. I understand there is no one size fit all solution to various issues a teacher might face in school and each model has its own pros and cons. It is therefore up to the teachers' discretion to choose the model that best suit their teaching style and the class profile. Personally, the concept of taking ownership under inner discipline resonates with me. I believe that it is important for students to accept ownership of their problem. Students need to learn that they are capable of taking ownership of their problems regardless of age. As teacher, I must trust that they also are capable of taking full responsibility for the problems their behaviors can create, not because of fear but because it is the right thing to do.

Assertive Discipline is a direct and positive approach to make it possible for the teacher to teach and the students to learn. During my contract teaching, there were times when I felt I was unable to deliver the lesson properly due to poor class control and denied pupils the opportunity to learn. However, after seeking advice from the senior teachers, I made certain changes such as implementing the rewards and punishment system. As a result, I was able to deliver most of the

lessons without much interruption. Students should be rewarded for good behavior and punished fairly for bad behavior. I think that having a short list of classroom rules posted in the class is beneficial. That way, from day one, they are aware of what is expected from them. However, it is necessary to exercise punishments with cautions to make sure students would not be more rebellious. I have also learned the various teaching style and I would prefer to adopt the democratic teaching style which the teacher provide firm guidance and leadership by establishing rules (Edwards, 2008). Pupils will then be taught how to establish an inner control that permits them to choose behavior compatible with their best interest.

I realized that teaching was indeed a calling. One needed a passion to teach and to make a difference in people's lives. One had to follow their heart and not their brain to appreciate the true difference made by being a teacher because being a teacher was hard work with many untold roles. One had to be unafraid to admit that mistakes have been committed and constantly reflect on lessons conducted so as to continually improve.

### **Bibliography**

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