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SLS 480P: Practicum

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### **Final Reflection**

Initially, the profession of language teaching was not appealing to me. Just the thought of being responsible for a classroom full of students, and their learning, would result in a bout of anxiety. In truth, there were enough instances prior to this practicum, in learning teaching methods and in working as a tutor, to keep me continually curious about leading a classroom. Prior to the start of this practicum, it was necessary for me to take inventory of what I would bring into the classroom. This includes: my skills, strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, values, goals, questions, and assumptions of teaching. By taking the reflective approach, my hope is to provide an overview of what I have learned and gained about the profession of language teaching and myself as a teacher so far.

### **Goals**

These are my four goals that I had set out to accomplish at the start of the practicum:

- *Expand from “one-on-one” context to the classroom setting.*

The only language teaching experience I have under my belt is by being employed as a writing tutor. Though I am competent and capable as a tutor, tutoring and classroom teaching are dissimilar in many ways. For example, as a tutor, I have full control in majority of the interactions between a single student and myself. Also, I strive to connect to students and to make every minute spent with me worthwhile. I hoped to use this mindset, and what I know about tutoring, and apply it to learning more skills in regards to teaching a classroom.

- *Familiarize myself with the language classroom setting.*

Being a language teacher is not the same as being a language student. I wanted to experience, through the eyes as an instructor, how a typical language class is conducted.

- *Learn more about constructing Lesson-Plans*

There are multiple ways to construct a lesson plan. In this practicum, I hoped to see the construction, implementation, and revisioning of lesson plans in real time. From observations I hoped to learn more and improve in my own way of lesson-plan construction.

- *Develop a 'voice' in the classroom setting.*

After the practicum, I hoped to have gained a sense of self, where I can express my personality and identity that reaches my colleagues, other teachers, and most importantly, the students. After practicing how to conduct myself as a professional inside and outside of the classroom, I hoped to have a clearer vision of the role of a teacher.

### **Reflecting on Goals**

Language teaching, in conjunction with language tutoring, complemented each other in that the concurrent experiences in tutoring developed my classroom teaching. And what I have observed in the classroom, are applicable to one-on-one tutoring. My reflections on both contexts are evident in my practicum journal. I have learned quickly, to carefully consider the feedback I provide to my students as a teacher. On a journal entry pertaining to the third week of practicum, there was a classroom incident that I'll always vividly remember. I remember walking around the classroom and targeting students who were either stuck on their topic or not on task, and asked them what their topic was on. My assumption, and experience from tutoring, was that sometimes it easier for some students to voice ideas out loud and talk about it, rather than jotting them onto paper. I made the mistake of saying, "that is a hard topic." The student was in shock and worried about her assignment. This prompted another student to ask if her topic was difficult as well. I learned that discouraging comments do not belong in any teaching context, whether it is in the classroom or in tutoring. Looking back, I went beyond the goal of expanding and applying what I know in tutoring, towards classroom teaching. The assumption of tutoring being on a continuum towards teaching was shattered, as I became a better tutor and a language teacher throughout this practicum.

Another assumption I had of teaching was that a good teacher constructs lesson plans that are then implemented perfectly. This meant that every learning objective were met and that a whole lesson plan was covered in its entirety. By meeting with my

cooperating teacher prior to the start of class to discuss the lesson(s) of the day, and a short discussion at the end of class, I got to see and experience first-hand my inaccurate view of lesson planning. To accommodate my practicum, my cooperating teacher would e-mail a rough lesson guideline the night before my weekly visits. Immediately, I learned the realities of what actually is done in the classroom. I learned to structure and pace units considering not just the class as whole, but the development of individual students. There were units that were covered quickly, and another unit that took another week to finish. In all, I learned that the more rigid a lesson plan was, the more it limits the instances where students get to chime in and contribute to their own learning. Ultimately, it is best to have a guideline for the day, but follow it according to the mood, atmosphere, and motivation of students and the teacher. There were days that the cooperating teacher expressed her sleepiness and tiredness. With this honesty, students connected better with the teacher, but did not hinder the lesson at hand at all. A lesson plan is only a guideline for that specific day, and goes through continuous revisions. And it is still okay if a planned lesson is completely abandoned.

There was an instance when a lesson that my cooperating teacher and I worked together on totally failed at the start of class. I lead a review of a grammar point, but the PowerPoint that was made for the day couldn't be used for that purpose. Very quickly, we improvised on the spot and turned the review, using said PowerPoint, into a game. Incentivizing the student's creativity, extra-credit was given to the winners of the game. In their excitement, the students didn't notice or have forgotten, and were not hindered at all by the failed lesson plan. I feel that I now know the realities of language teaching and implementation of lesson plans, which is another fulfilled goal of this practicum.

I have mentioned that I sought to find my 'voice' as a teacher. I am not fully aware yet of how I sound and look when I am up front and center in the classroom. With that said, nervousness and worry are the least of my concerns. By being so, my focus is to communicate effectively and meaningfully when I am leading the class. Kenny, my advisor, after an observation, has praised the way I spoke: by chunking words, deliberate pauses, appropriate volume, and using plain language in explanations. When I was asked if it came naturally, or if I was consciously conducting myself in that way, or picked it up from my cooperating teacher, I honestly did not know. I could not choose which one

individually; rather I believe it was a mixture of all three. Moreover, I think my comfortableness with the students was more of an influential factor. I am not totally convinced that I speak effectively, as I think I have so much to improve in that aspect. I have proven to myself that I do have a ‘voice’ that enables me to communicate my personality with fellow colleagues in our very own Teacher Development Group, to other teachers, and to my students in a meaningful manner.

### **Assumptions and Beliefs**

In my observation of two classes of the same section that my cooperating teacher teaches (high-level proficiency versus lower-level proficiency), I have learned that even for the higher-level class a teacher asking questions is not necessarily for eliciting answers, but to generate thinking. Prior to this practicum course, I had the assumption that addressing the class with a question needs to be reciprocated with answers from student(s). I learned to only ask questions that we as teachers are able to explain and answer ourselves. Unanswered questions, the quiet of the room, and patiently waiting for an attempt of answer I have noticed is very typical of an ESL class. It was good that I have made that realization, because it helped me understand what a typical ESL class is in this specific context even more. As an ESL teacher, one needs to get used to having one’s questions unanswered and be patient in times of silence when addressing questions to a class.

My belief of what an *engaged* classroom is has been changed, due to our class discussions and the video that was provided to showcase an example of what an engaged class may mean. In this video, an instructor had total control of his classroom and seemed authoritative-esque at first. Seeing the video all the way through it was obvious that the instructor was very competent in classroom management. Although he did most of the talking, all the students gave him his full attention. There was also a certain or a specific way everything had to be done in the classroom. One thing that was new, and what I’ll remember to try to take into my own teaching, is to share and remind the students about what is expected of them. He praised the students, acknowledging when they (or a single student) has met an expectation. For example: “period 3, you are silently filling out the handout. That is expected of you, and you all have met my expectations.” It was also new

to hear a teacher explicitly voice out loud what the students were currently doing in the class.

Initially, I thought an *engaged* classroom was filled with dialogue and interactions. I have seen *engaged* in terms of enjoyment. I believed that *engaged*, meant *being on task*. In our Teacher Development Group, we have shaped together the meaning of *engaged*. Priscilla, another advisor, has provided us the Merriam-Webster definition relevant to us: a) to hold the attention of, b) to induce to participate. Those definitions connect well with the video. It was interesting to debate whether there can be an overlap of *to inspire* and *being on task*. I take the stance that they can overlap, though the explanation of the separation sounded valid in my opinion.

Learners of all proficiencies are at the mercy of meaningful and comprehensive feedback from a teacher. I do believe that the most underutilized motivational tool that teachers are easily equipped with is praise. This enables students to continue returning to class. The ideal student is one that comes to class. The ideal classroom is comfortable, yet engaging. A language-learning classroom involves, “meaningful learner-learner, learner-teacher classroom interaction in which learners are entitled and encouraged to initiate topic and talk, not just react and respond” (Kumaravidelu 2003). It is the duty of the teacher to maximize learning opportunities in the classroom. And ideally, the job is a success when learners are: curious, capable, willing, and knowledgeable achievers.

## **Strengths**

The culmination of this practicum has led me through the Pre-service Stage and to the cusp of the Induction Stage of teaching, which is the start of the career cycle of teachers. During the induction period, new teachers strive for acceptance by students, peers, and supervisors and attempt to achieve comfort and security in dealing with everyday problems and issues (Lynn 2002). Being a novice in the profession of language teaching, I am still fluid in my ways. Meaning that I do not have any habits or routines that are rigid and set. I am very much still learning how to teach, and I am open to trying out new and different approaches. I am also eager and have a drive to please colleagues, advisors, and students.

A strength I do take pride in myself for is that I am a harmonizer. I strive for social cohesion within the classroom and I do not want any of my students to feel excluded or singled out. I push to regularly use small group tasks, for the importance of interaction, cooperation, and collaboration with language use. I also take very careful consideration of grouping or pairing of students, ideally matching either the development or personality of students. Also, by embedding my name, student's names, and myself in lessons, I encourage the sharing of experiences and stories. One of my teaching philosophies is to have a sense of community within the classroom. Lastly, I also encourage friendship among my students within the classroom.

### **New Goals**

One limitation I do have is that I have much to learn about explicit rules of English grammar. As much as having a native speaker intuition can get me by in tutoring, the classroom requires more from me, especially in regards to questions related to specific grammatical rules from students. There is also a balancing act to consider: following curriculum and program goals, and to have students engaged and having fun. My priority as a novice teacher is that I want my students to have fun, connect with the lesson, and enjoy learning. I am aware that in the future, that I will need to change my priorities, or find and learn ways to satisfy the curriculum goals *with* enjoyable lessons. I have to remind myself, that as a teacher: learning is more important than fun. And that learning won't always be fun.

I have discovered one aspect in my teaching that I am the least confident in. On the last time I lead a lesson on my own, I only covered a third of what I intended to cover from my lesson plan. I have learned a lot from observing my cooperating teacher, but I don't have the eye yet to determine when is the right time to end an activity. I have difficulties in ending activities, especially when students are having fun or enjoying the topic of discussion. Sometimes, I wait until the last few students are done. This is not effective in classroom time management. A rule of thumb that my cooperating teacher follows is that she ends activities when around 75% of the students have completed it. The difficulty in determining when 75% of students are done has been acknowledged, and the advice given to me was that time management is a teacher skill that is developed

through the act of teaching. Although I have been told not to be harsh on myself for being unable to cover a whole lesson plan, I intend to improve on better transitions between class activities and to have a stronger grasp on time management.

### **Continuance of Reflective Teaching**

My teaching toolbox has grown a hundredfold in this practicum. Through the reflective approach, I have learned to regularly take inventory of what I bring into the classroom. This includes: my skills, strengths, weaknesses, beliefs, values, goals, questions, and assumptions of teaching. I now have a clearer self-perception as a teacher, and experienced the realities of leading a language classroom. Within the classroom, there were instances and critical incidents that shaped, and will continually shape my beliefs and philosophy of teaching. The most valuable discoveries of recent, are having found my 'voice' as a teacher and found that I enjoy the challenge of turning learning objectives to be fun and communicative for my students.

I have tremendous appreciation towards my cooperating site, my cooperating teacher, my Teacher Development Group, fellow tutoring staff, practicum advisors, and most importantly, my students. I am developing as a teacher, and seek to improve my teaching. Although this is titled as a Final Reflection, this will not be the end of me taking the reflective approach to teaching. I will continue to reflect upon anything and everything that happens within the classroom, and to things that are related or applicable to the teaching profession by keeping a teaching reflection journal. Within this journal, I plan include reflections of deliberate observations of other teachers and colleagues. Also, subscribing to language teachers association's literature and to consider implementation of a Teacher Development Group wherever I teach, are other ways that will enable my continuance to improve as a teacher.

## **Works Cited**

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