

REFLECTIVE LEARNING LOG

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"The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but... a fire to be lighted." Plutarch (46 – 120).

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Introduction

Here are my reflections during the seven weeks at the University of Chichester, during the classes with Kathy Reina and Francisco Melara Gutiérrez, our main teachers, and long after those lessons.

I am thankful for the experience and for the opportunity given to spend that time reflecting about Education. Extremely enriching were the interactions among the group of teachers; it was an excellent idea to join Primary and Secondary teachers. We normally lack the time to reflect on our journey and to share with other colleagues and grow together as teachers. In the UK observing and being observed by other teachers is a common practice and I find it greatly enlightening. I wish we could do this back in our schools

Time, distance and light –a certain amount of knowledge- help to get a better view of the whole picture.

Aim of the Programme: to develop teaching skills to become a more effective teacher

by practicing these areas:

- Critical reading
- writing and thinking
- reflective and reflexive practice

Assessment tools:

- Group discussion
- Tasks
- Presentations
- Portfolio
- Self -evaluation

Assessment criteria:

- Knowledge understanding
- Skills
- Systematic enquiry
- Active participation

The importance of being student again

One of the first thoughts I have every time I attend a course is that, as a teacher, becoming a student again is absolutely necessary. It is important to see things from the other side, to understand student's feelings and how the teacher's actions affect the students'. Taking into account the student's needs is more natural if being a student is a frequent experience.

On the other hand, I have realized that some of us were actually using many of these strategies in our classes without knowing their actual name, or even not knowing that they were part of a greater pedagogical principle. I am afraid that Secondary teachers didn't have enough specific pedagogical training before becoming teachers. It does make sense to situate things in its place and to reflect on *what* and *why*; however, to assimilate all this will take time as well.

Comparing different styles of teaching

It was also interesting observing different teachers at University. Some of them had a more CLIL approach, while others were more traditional. The first type of lessons was more engaging, but it also has the disadvantage of covering comparatively a significantly fewer amount of information, though probably in this way the students actually learn the content in class.

In certain subjects, at certain level, is problematic to switch to what this engaging, learner-centred, tasks-based approach, because it would be simply impossible to cover all the contents from the Curriculum. So probably the best solution would be to use one or another according to the needs and the time available. I also personally think that with younger students it is extremely positive to use a participative methodology, for a number of reasons, but as the students grow up and the subjects get more demanding, a shift to a more on the content based approach would be more effective.

Besides, from my own experience after three weeks in a British school, I think that the amount of content that students from the same age have to learn in British and in Spanish schools is not comparable. While in Spain students are expected to reach a quite wide knowledge, the British students are expected to learn a smaller quantity of knowledge, but deeper. For the A levels -18 years old- they have to choose three-four subjects, and focus on them, while our students have to cope with nine.

Not only useful for bilingual teachers

Many of the tips and strategies I have learnt during the course in the UK can be applied in any class and by any teacher. From putting emphasis on the students by making them build the content instead of lecturing them; the use of questions to make students aware of *what* they are learning, *how* and *why* or the extremely effective principles and small details around classroom management...

Business, values and Education

These days Education is getting the center of attention in many ways. The focus has turned to the teachers, it is quite clear, for instance, in "*El Libro Blanco sobre la Profesión Docente*" de José Antonio Marina. I am in favour of changes in Education; however I have my doubts about the current direction they have taken.

Marina, to describe our ever changing world, uses the acronym VUCA that stands for *Volatility* – describing the speed of current changes-; *Uncertainty, Complexity* –the world has become smaller than ever while, but the problems are probably bigger than ever: climate change, economic crisis, wars or migratory movements- and finally *Ambiguity*. I agree, to a certain extent, with the description he does of Education nowadays, but not with the reasons behind. I do believe there are many things to improve in our system, but there are also many things that really work, and could get damage if things are not carefully handled.

Linking school to real life is desirable, I even think that it may be a good idea to learn effectiveness from business as we live in a competitive society, but encouraging competitiveness, placing individual success ahead of cooperation and letting business world into the classroom may be not the best solution. Education has to keep feet on the ground but the key is *how*. I couldn't agree more with what César Prestel wrote in his own Reflective Log talking about the power of values in school and the relation between the values in which one believe and the kind of person that one is: *"I wish we could foster a serious debate in Spain about these issues, as a first step in the complex process of transforming our educational system into a more human, ethical and reflective one!"*. I would like my students to learn how to thrive together; I would like them to ask themselves questions such as what really matters and why. Going back to that debate, I would first set this question: *Where as society do we want to get?*

Related to the previous question, I also wonder which the real objectives behind the educational objectives are. This may be a little bit confusing, but as a teacher I ask myself where actually are *meant to lead* the skills and knowledge acquired by the students. Just the mere selection of contents involves an ideological positioning. I know this goes beyond the competences of a teacher, but I find it extremely interesting. I was talking to another Art teacher about what to do when a student gives an answer that is not "the right one", when our subject is supposed to work around creativity and when this means there are not "right" or wrong answers. We all agree creativity should be an important part of Education, to be creative means an advantage in any situation, but we are not precisely boosting creativity by encouraging our students following instructions and learning "the right way" to do things. On the contrary, if we really want to develop creativity we should encourage free thinking so they would find their own way.

During my school attachment experience, I witnessed the perverse side of putting outcomes in front of it all: as teacher you can be a smart "salesperson" and prepare your students to perform successfully an exam without learning much. That is an example of the consequences of a system based in extrinsic motivation while intrinsic motivation not only gives a sense of purpose but also increases meaningful learning and self-esteem and is connected to the concept of process, not progress, which I believe is the key of successful teaching and learning. I myself struggled with this portfolio, due to lack of time and to the fact that it was something that *I had to do*. Only when I turn it into something meaningful for me, I started, only in part, enjoying it. I partly manage to do it from intrinsic motivation.

Being a teacher

Why choosing to be a teacher? I remember when I was at school and I used to help some classmates before an exam. I really enjoyed being helpful and sharing something I had just learnt myself; I don't know to what extent I was aware of the fact that in the process of trying to make them understand *I* was learning about it deeper.

Transferring knowledge and skills within the community has been an essential part of the human experience since the beginning and it has always been connected to perception and the need of survival.

Nowadays there are an increasing number of worn-out teachers. They need more than ever to motivate students, as the current situation is not precisely promising, but it may be a hard work to motivate someone when being motivated is not an easy task. Teachers are along with the students the most important factors in Education. Teachers should be supported and conditions that let them do their job properly should be met. Because a more motivated teacher is a more creative and effective one! Again, the key words are *what* and *how*. This is what I have been thinking about the matter:

- To create a supportive environment in schools.
- To actually develop a culture of sharing materials and experiences.
- To develop a peer-feedback system.
- To reduce non-meaningful paperwork to allow more time for reflection and coordination of cooperative educational projects. Saving time is saving energy.

How did I feel during the process?

Apart from feeling privileged for being there, I felt many times unease. It is normal when you are out of your comfort zone, but it is also true that confronting a quite different way of doing things, on the one hand, and non-stop working for a long period of time, on the other, make things simple difficult. Besides, working under pressure, not always having clear goals or a clear picture of the whole, I felt sometimes unfocused and extremely tired. Kathy Reina, a most sensitive teacher, invited us to give just the 80% instead the 120%. She felt how exhausted we were getting and tried to relief us from the high level of responsibility we felt. It is nice, as student, to find understanding teachers. That is something that I, as a teacher, wouldn't like to forget.

We were a great team of teachers and I personally think that it would have been even better if our needs and wishes as teachers would have been taken more into account, the experience would have been meaningful and rewarding. This is my "*even better if*" point for this Programme.