

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MY F WEEKS PERFORMANCE

BACKGROUND

My F weeks were allocated in a school with approximately 1200 pupils, located in a quiet but lively town in the North West. The school has a sixth form college integrated within it and has been awarded "Technology College" status. Ofsted reported it as a "Good" performing school in its latest report and the ICT pass rate (A*-C) currently stands at 100%.

That was all the information I had before I began my F weeks placement. I also had no prior experience teaching in a secondary school.

Everything I am about to share with you now is based upon the time I have spent at this school. To simplify the process I have laid out the analysis in Question/Answer format.

What were you pleased about?

I had a very positive & supportive environment in which to learn.

Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden (2000) assert *"the level and nature of support that teachers receive is another influential factor in teaching"*

My mentor was experienced, friendly and he had high expectations of me. To maintain my mentor's high expectations, I made sure I lead the mentor session each week with a brief reflection of the week and provisional targets for improvement. This allowed me to reflect both critically on my own performance (Q7) and allow me to view the wider role of teaching in which to set my own targets.

My mentor's friendly approach also made it easy to accept his advice & feedback (Q9), which was mostly praise, but did highlight areas of concern such as assessment and individual progress where I was lacking.

Also, far from my initial concern about how I would manage behaviour of pupils, I was pleasantly surprised to have arrived at a school where pupils generally had a cheerful disposition and were hard working. This allowed me to have appropriately high expectations of them and develop a professional relationship with them without difficulty (Q1).

"Limitations in student learning outcomes may be largely determined by the expectations teachers set for their performance" (Pugach & Seidl, 1995).

What did you hope to achieve during this placement?

I hoped to gain the insight, knowledge & relevant experience needed to fulfill my role as a qualified secondary school ICT teacher and I personally feel I have met this objective for the following reasons:

1. Having spent nearly 4 months at the school, there are not many aspects of the life of a teacher that I have not experienced personally or witnessed. The experience is not complete by any means but it is a good starting point.

2. I have taught across all year groups and across all ability ranges. Here again, the

opportunities given were only brief but enough for me to have a good grasp of the differences in learning and teaching styles.

3. I was placed in a form group which allowed me to experience the pastoral role of teachers and see some of the policies, practices, rewards and sanctions of the school being implemented.

4. I've observed that both my form tutor and mentor were allocated times to monitor pupils during their break times and I am sure it would be expected of me to fulfill this role when I work as a qualified teacher.

5. I've attend two parent's evenings. It gave me an insight into the wider responsibilities of teachers (Q4, Q5) and how teachers liaise with parents. Although I was not confident enough to answer their queries directly, I am sure that in a full time role I would know more about each individual pupil and be able to give a complete and accurate picture to their parent's.

Did the placement cover all the TTA standards?

I managed successfully to cover all the standards during my first placement. Unfortunately the depth at which some of the standards were covered was not very deep.

The lack of depth is partly due to the lack of opportunity presented during my placement and partly because some standards were difficult to document and evidence. For instance, the evidence for some standards was easy to obtain, like the QTS skills tests (Q16), yet others more difficult to document such as commitment to collaboration (Q6)

In my second placement, however, I hope to build upon what I have already achieved & learnt and cover each standard in greater depth.

One of the reasons I will be better able to cover standards in greater depth is because I'll be in school every day of the week and consequently I will be in regular contact with my pupils & classes and be able to, for instance, monitor their progress more closely.

How did your personal organisation impact on the first placement?

From the very beginning I was forewarned that there would be an avalanche of paperwork coming over the following weeks. I therefore made sure that notes, reflections, lesson plans and resources were allocated correctly to separate individual files and not just added to a file for later review. This not only proved invaluable when assessing my own progress as a teacher but saved me a lot of time and effort looking for relevant evidence and information whilst teaching.

For instance, looking for seating plans for specific lessons would otherwise had been very difficult if the teaching file was not organised. When teaching lessons one after the other it really does pay to be organised.

Also, had I not been organised in managing resources or planning for failure of the network or projector etc I doubt I would have survived my first placement. There have been many occasions where the equipment has failed and without back up strategies in place, lessons grind to a halt.

Hay McBer report has stated that 'Effective teachers achieve the management of the class by having a clear structure for each lesson, making full use of planned time, using a brisk pace and allocating his/her time fairly amongst pupils' (2000, paragraph 1.2.9).

What differentiation strategies did you use and how effective were they?

"Differentiated work is work which is designed to allow pupils with different abilities to achieve preset goals" (Capel et al, 2005)

Differentiation was one of the topics I had covered in depth and can be seen in the appendices. Overall I differentiated by outcome and by support. Differentiation by task is something I still need to look into.

It is something I have not pondered over much in this placement primarily due to the overall concern over my own planning and teaching progress.

I currently view differentiation as a "fine tuning" art of teaching and as such I wish to reflect more upon this in my next placement.

Was your questioning effective? How did pupils respond to questioning? Were they all involved?

(Part 1 of this assignment expands on this).

Apart from that I have learnt two further things:

1) I was not aware, until recently, about the role that gender plays in questioning and I shall pay close attention to this in my next placement.

2) I have also noticed that my behaviour has an affect on how pupils respond to questions. For instance, if I adopt a dominant and cheerful disposition the pupils respond positively towards my enquiries but if I remain calm and unmotivated the responses, if any, would lack any real enthusiasm.

I understand this would expand in the behaviour 4 learning section but this particular aspect had never occurred to me before.

Did you use resources effectively? Were they appropriate for your pupils?

During the start of my placement I developed my own resources and spent many hours labouring over design and quality of the resource. This became increasingly difficult when my teaching timetable increased.

I then adapted resources found online and moulded them to suit the pupils I was teaching. I always found it helpful to provide resources on the network drive, at school, so that those pupils who needed extra help or guidance could freely access it without feeling guilty or worried about how others viewed them.

Physical resources such as paper, ink cartridges, pens etc although in plentiful supply need to be checked regularly. I have seen several instances, in the lessons I have observed, where paper has run out of the printer and a simple item such as a missing hole punch has caused chaos in the class room.

The network, also, although reliable most of the time is definitely not suitable for internet surfing due to large bandwidth use at one time. To solve this issue, I would often download appropriate material onto the network drive and allow pupils to read through the resources.

Were there any surprises?

The amount of work required to plan one lesson did surprise me. I have always heard that it takes three hours to plan one lesson but never contemplated over why it took so long.

I now realise that questioning, inclusion, differentiation & assessment are all packaged within the lesson and need to be thought about in great detail.

Lesson planning still takes me a long time but the thought process is more natural and I am sure with more experience it will also become as efficient as my teaching.

Was it necessary to change tack during the placement? Why?

The initial training period was very natural for me. Led by my desire to learn, I took every available opportunity to liaise with staff increase my subject knowledge (Q15), act upon advice (Q9) and participate in departmental meetings. (Q32)

Towards the end of my placement, however, I was more standards focused. This drove out much of the fun of learning but was necessary in order to continue on the course and qualify as a teacher.

The positive outcome of this, however, was that the standards highlighted areas that I had not considered or paid much attention to such as homework planning and individual assessment.

Notes/points for the next placement.

I would like to get to know my pupils better and look at each of their individual progress more closely. I was unable to do this in my first placement as I was only there three days a week and would miss many lessons where my pupils were being taught. I also was more worried about my general teaching practice than individual pupil progress.

But as I have now gained much more experience in teaching and have more confidence I hope my next placement will allow me to focus more on individual progress.

I was not given an opportunity to plan homework (Q24) but understand the need is also something which do. because the school has a homework policy where certain subjects have allocated weeks in which to assign homework.

What would you change if you had to do this placement again?

Had I known what I know now, about being a good teacher, I would have hit the ground running in my first placement. This, at least, shows that I view my first experience as having had a very positive and productive influence on me.

If I had started from the same point then the only thing I would change is that I would have set up my own chess club. The only reason I didn't do this originally was because of my own lack of self confidence. I am now, however, much more confident and I hope to start my own chess club in my next placement. (If they don't already have one)

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