Appendix 1: Reflection and Evaluation

Introduction

Reflection and evaluation of your own practice in the classroom forms an integral part of the teaching process. These skills need to be developed during teacher-training to ensure that the basic teaching skills have been reached by the time you become a qualified teacher. They are skills that you need to possess and utilise throughout your entire teaching career. It is through reflection and evaluation that you can experience professional development which enables you to become a more proficient and effective teacher with experience.

Reflection and evaluation should be considered as positive aspects of teaching. As a teacher, you reflect on your practice and evaluate your performance in order to identify what went well, what did not go so well, or not as planned, why, and to think up alternate possibilities and methodologies which would be more appropriate in further practice. This is not an exercise in emphasising faults or weakness but should be viewed as a way of identifying your strengths together with areas that need further development.

Teachers plan and organise learning experiences which they feel would benefit their pupils. Learning activities rarely work out the way they are planned. At times they are more effective than envisaged. Teachers thus need to reflect and assess the outcomes of a learning activity and evaluate the degree of success or failure of their performance. As a teacher, this exercise helps you in re-planning and changing your approaches as you gain experience; subsequently, your practice becomes more effective with experience.

Proctor, Entwistle, Judge & McKenzie-Murdoch (1995) outline five steps in the exercise of reflection and evaluation, or as they call it, self-appraisal. These include:

- Identification of critical incidents
- Reflection and analyses
- Learning about oneself
- Application of the learning
- Self-monitoring

Identifying critical incidents during classroom practice refers to a particular situation created in a learning context which highlights a barrier or facilitation to the learning process. According to Tripp (1993), the significance of the incident or event makes it ‘critical’.

Incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation, it is an interpretation of the significance of the event.

Ghaye & Lillyman (1999) describe an incident as an experience:

- that can be an ordinary experience
- where the experience did not go to plan (these may be positive as well as negative experiences)
- went well
- that reflects the values and beliefs held by the individual

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e. identify the contribution of qualified practitioners
f. when it allows the identification of learning.

Once this critical incident or incidents are identified, the teacher then reflects and analyses them in order to identify what s/he has learnt about her/himself as a teacher, the children as learners and about teaching and learning in general. On the basis of the reflection and learning, the teacher then applies this learning, which may involve a consolidation or change in approach to other situations. As this process of reflection and evaluation is repeated, the teacher monitors his/her own progress.

**Aims and objectives**

By the end of the tutorial and observations you should be able to:

- highlight the role and importance for teachers to reflect on and evaluate their practice;
- describe the process of evaluation and reflection;
- identify the different types and focus that the exercise can take;
- evaluate and reflect upon your own teaching; and
- write the evaluation report required during teaching practice.

**Writing a self-evaluation during teaching practice**

There are various ways that student-teachers can approach their self-evaluation exercise during teaching practice. Whatever the approach, it is important to be able to reflect and evaluate on your own practice. Self-evaluations can be written on general lines where the teacher reflects on his/her practice overall, or else focused on particular issues related to learning and teaching. See the Reflective Questions (RQs) in the Primary Kit. The RQs are designed to help you reflect on some aspects of classroom practice. It is an exercise to set your reflective process in motion.

**General Self-Evaluation**

In a general evaluation, the teacher looks at his/her own practice holistically over a period of time. This can be done on a weekly basis. Reflection will involve looking at the different learning activities and trying to identify which ones went well and which ones were not as good as planned. The teacher can then identify the strengths and weaknesses of his/her performance and learn from them. S/he then goes on to identify what alternative strategies and methodologies s/he could have used instead. This exercise can also be done for specific lessons for which more reflection is needed due to the way that they turned out. Various educational issues can be taken into consideration, depending on the situations and critical incidents arising during the practice within the period under evaluation.

**Self-Evaluation focusing on specific education issues**

At times, the teacher may decide to reflect and focus on specific educational issues, for example one’s communication skills like questioning technique, classroom management like organisation of group-work, inclusion, dealing with particular learning difficulties etc. The scope of such focus is that due to factors or needs within the school, classroom or personal interest, the teacher feels the need to reflect and evaluate his/her practice with respect to particular education issues.

So how does the teacher decide which type of evaluation is best? It is always important for the teacher to have an overall view of her/his own practice, but it is always important for her/him at
times to stop and reflect on specific issues. The teacher thus has to be aware of the demands that s/he needs to focus on.

**Observation tasks and activities**
1. During your school experience visit, focus on one particular lesson and identify two critical incidents, one of good practice and one which was problematic.
2. Describe these incidents.
3. Why did you consider these situations as ‘critical’? What was different to the usual classroom practice?
4. Identify what these incidents tell you about the learning process and about the children as learners.
5. If you were the teacher, what would you learn from these two critical incidents?
6. How would you plan to apply what you have learnt to future classroom practice?
7. Identify a particular lesson which you or the class teacher delivered. Write a detailed evaluation to include general comments and reflections as well as specific education issues you would like to improve upon.

**Issues to discuss and consider**
1. Print out the reflective questions available on the Primary Kit. Go through the questions with your tutor and colleagues. Identify some issues which have occurred in lessons you have observed in class and reflect on these issues with the help of the questions. It would be interesting for pairs of students observing identical lessons in the same classroom to reflect on different aspects of the same lesson. Alternatively, you may focus on the same aspects and come up with different suggestions/solutions to what the teacher did or what your colleague suggests.
2. Below are 2 self-evaluations written by a 1st Year student-teacher during teaching practice.

**Example 1 – Weekly Self-evaluation**

**Focus – Communication**

This week has been a super week. I am settling in and I’m happy about it. I am happy with myself. I am in the right place. Good communication skills are an important asset which every teacher should possess. How you communicate with your students determines how much they learn and the type of relationship you maintain with them. After my second week, I feel that I have acquired a few of these skills from the time I have spent in the classroom.

**Attitude in class**
Firstly, I have found that it is important to have a positive attitude in the classroom. Greeting the students with a smile and a joke in the morning will set the mood for their whole day. I think that this has helped me create a friendship with my students. Every morning, I greet each student and ask them little questions about what they did after school the previous day or if they had problems with their homework. Once they saw that I was joking around with them, they started trusting me
more and wanting to spend time with me every morning. These few minutes every morning helped me relax my students which meant that when it was time to start lessons, they would settle down easier. Having a friendship with your students means that they will trust you more. When reflecting I also realized that since I listened to the children, it made them less scared of me. For example, if a student did not do her homework because she had a family problem, she came up to me in the morning and explained her reason. Students who do not trust me as much as others would start crying and panicking if they forgot their homework.

**Non-verbal communication**
Apart from talking to your students, non-verbal communication is also a very important skill to achieve. Things such as your position in class, movement and gestures all have an effect on the students. During the past week I noticed that the students paid more attention when I was explaining something from the front centre of the class in front of the board, rather than at the back corner of the class next to the monitor. Because of this I found myself constantly shifting between the two. If I needed to use the monitor during the lesson I would constantly go to the front of the class when explaining. I also noticed that when I pointed to things such as pictures or particular words, the students remembered them more. My voice was also something which I observed. The children have now grown accustomed to my voice. The can tell by my pitch and tone whether I am joking or if I am getting angry. They know the voice I use when I am explaining or when I am asking them questions. My facial expressions and eye contact is also something which they have gotten used to. Some students have a habit of asking questions which I know they know the answer of since I would just have explained it. They just feel the need to keep asking questions. When this happens, I usually do not answer them and from the look on my face they can tell that it is silly of them to ask such a thing. All these are different types of non-verbal communication, which although are not as obvious as verbal communication, are just as important and effective.

**Personal qualities and attitudes of a teacher**
There are certain qualities and attitudes which a good effective teacher must possess. These attitudes will make the teaching job more enjoyable. In my school I have noticed that there are teachers who come to school in the morning with a very negative attitude. I think that this is what makes their day less enjoyable. From my perspective, I have found the job to be extremely tiring but also very fun and rewarding. I look forward to the fun activities which the day holds and all the laughter I will share with my class. The lessons you plan also have a lot to do with this. When planning lessons, one must keep in mind how they are going to be delivered and how much fun not only the children will have but also you as a teacher. The children can tell if you are enjoying it or not and if not they will not enjoy it either. It is not just how you plan the lesson but also how you deliver it. Keeping calm in all situations is essential so that, ultimately the students ultimately get where you want them to be. A teacher must possess an excessive amount of patience and calmness. She must also have a friendly attitude so that the students feel comfortable going to her with problems or asking questions. These qualities and attitudes are what a teacher should seek to possess because once you have them, the job will be less difficult and more fun.

**Finally**
As my second week came to an end, I reflected upon these communication skills. I found that I was quite happy with the way I am communicating with my class. My tutor has also highlighted some of my communication skills and praised me for these skills which made me more motivated to keep perfecting my communication skills. I believe that good communication is what will teach the children what you want them to know. It also creates a positive vibe in the class room where the students feel comfortable speaking and being themselves.
Example 2 – One lesson a week self-evaluation

Social Studies lesson of Thursday 2nd May

The reason why I chose to evaluate this lesson is completely the opposite of why I had chosen to evaluate the lessons in the previous two weeks. I have chosen to evaluate this Social Studies lesson which I have delivered to the children on the 2nd May as I am very pleased with it.

What went well

In my opinion it was a very simple lesson but the children really enjoyed it and I easily managed to reach the objectives which I had set for the lesson. The lesson was about animals in the house therefore, pets. I started the lesson by asking the children questions about what pets they have or what pets they wish that they have. The children really involved themselves in the discussion and in fact it took more time than I had planned. I did not stop the children from discussing about pets as it was clear that they were enjoying themselves and since it was relevant to the lesson, I saw no harm in letting them spend some more time discussing. In order to eventually stop the discussion and move on to the next step of the lesson, I showed the children a video about adopting pets and so that I would not need to keep on telling the children to stop talking as they had stopped on their own in order to watch the video. The children were then asked to draw a picture and write a short description of their favourite pet or a pet which they wish that they have. Even though this was a very simple and quite a traditional exercise, the children really enjoyed themselves and they were very eager to share their description of the pet with each other. I felt that the lesson was delivered smoothly and that it was positively characterised throughout. The time quickly passed by as it was clearly evident that all the children were enjoying themselves as the children in the class love animals. As usual, there was this child ‘N’ who refused to write and wanted only to draw the picture of the pet. With a lot of extra effort I managed to encourage this child to write a short description about the pet. It was amazing how once he started to write, he ended up writing much more than I had expected him to.

What didn't go well

As regards to weaknesses, I think that at first I did not feel well-prepared to face child ‘A’ who was not able to write sentences in order to describe the pet. I had always prepared simple worksheets for this child in Maltese, English and also previous Social Studies lessons but for some reason I had forgotten to do such a simplified worksheet for this lesson. This caused me some problems as I was not going to expect the child to write the sentences like the other children but I still wanted him to do some writing. Even though at first this concerned me quite a bit, I then decided to write some fill in the blanks sentences for him so that then he would only need to write some key words.

What I will do next time

I feel that this weakness could have easily been avoided if I checked my work well. It really isn’t like me to have such careless mistakes as usually I always check my work. I had then made it a point that I would double check my work, especially the lesson plans as I might have not spotted a mistake whilst I would be checking my work the first time. Furthermore, it would not be fair on the children as the lesson plans directly have an effect on them. It would also be
unprofessional to forget about children with low achieving pupils in the class as the teacher should be well-prepared for all the class children.

On the whole it was a very positive lesson. Besides reaching my objectives, I felt that the children’s happiness and eagerness to participate in the lesson was enough to make it quite a successful Social Studies lesson.