

Learning by Serving: Our Students' Reflection on Their Service Teaching to The Ethnic Minority Children

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1. ABSTRACT & KEYWORDS

This paper outlines the course design of a service project in which the students learn to teach Chinese to the children of ethnic minorities with the language arts element. Reflective journal is seen as a key assignment to review what students have learned in this subject. Students are encouraged to take log of each lesson from the very beginning when the lecturers prepare them for the teaching. During the service period, they are required to record the major activities of each lesson, service recipients' response and what they can do to improve. At the end of the service teaching, each group has to write up a report for the organization they serve. Finally they have to write reflective journal incorporating all the log sheets, teaching records and reports as appendices. The guideline of the reflective journal is given to students before they set off do the service teaching, and from the journals, students reviewed they personal growth, teach work, teaching performance and the care of children from ethnic minorities. Some extracts were chosen to show the students' reflection on the learning outcomes we expect.

Keywords: Reflective journal, Ethnic minority children, Teaching Chinese

2. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the case of service learning subject CBS2S03 which is Language Arts for community projects: teaching Chinese as a service learning experience. Students taking this subjects are required to teach Chinese to needy children by incorporating the language arts element. From 2014 when the subject was first offered, the reflective journal has been adopt as an assessment at the end of the service period. However, the input to the journal begins from the very first lesson of the course. While the reflection is personal, guidelines have been given to students to ensure they do not deviate too much from expectation, We take this opportunity to reflect on whether the learning outcomes set out at the beginning of this course have been achieved, and how they have been achieved.

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3. COURSE DESIGN, CONTENT AND ASSESSMENT

The objectives of this subject include raising students' awareness of social issues in Hong Kong and understanding the challenges faced by children with special learning needs; enhancing students' sensitivity and awareness of the roles and functions of language in addressing the different needs of people from various domains, and the generic competencies of innovative problem solving, communication and teamwork. The targets of this service project are students from lesser background who need some extra help in learning Chinese, and it turned out that most service recipients were children from ethnic minorities, mainly Nepalese and Pakistani. These children cannot afford to go to international schools and instead attend local schools that have Chinese programme for Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students. However, students of the same year may have very different levels of Chinese standard, thus making the teaching job very difficult. Language arts is used as a more integrated way of learning the Chinese language in a less traditional but more pragmatic and yet playful manner.

On the other hand, university students taking this service project have all learned Chinese, and many of them worked as part-time private tutors. Some thought they can make use of their experience to teach Chinese to our target students. However, they soon found out the job is not that simple. The written form and spoken form of Chinese is not consistent in Hong Kong. Although some Nepalese and Pakistani students were born in Hong Kong and can converse in Cantonese, most of them find it very difficult to read and write Chinese, and thus their learning incentive is low. The teaching job involves understanding the nature of Chinese language in Hong Kong, understanding the needs and difficulties of the target children, being able to select suitable teaching materials and use some teaching skills, and good communication skills, which many students thought they have.

The five assessment components of this course covered the concept of service learning, the taught content of this course, the organization teaching plans and teaching materials, and the implementation, and a reflective journal.

4. THE ROLES OF THE REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

Quality of service learning matters and the quality that matters most is the amount and type of reflection (Eyler, 2002). Bringle & Hatcher (1999) identified five types of reflective journals: key phrase journal, double-entry journal, critical incident journal, three part journal and directed writing. We have modified the three part journal and constructed a guideline to help our students write up the journal. In the first part, students are expected to give a brief account of the whole learning and serving process. In the second part, they should analyze their strengths and weaknesses, and highlight their gains and thoughts. The third part should be a reflection on the service. Students also need to include appendices of seminar notes, teaching records and report to servicing school/organization. Content weighs 60% and the quality of the write-up weighs 40%. The journal is expected to provide insightful self-reflections after the service with evidence of personal growth, deep learning and mastery of skills. It should also show the student's sense of responsibility and contribution to the community he/she has served, and how he/she can further improve his/her

service.

Students knew from the first lesson that they are to write a reflective journal at the end of the course, and they are encouraged to keep log of what they have learned, experienced, or felt from each seminar during the initial learning period. The students were divided into groups when servicing, so they took turns to teach or take the leading role in activities. They need to write up a record of the lesson they taught, and the involvement of each team member. They have to update the teaching schedule as it goes, and at the end of the course, they have to write up a report to the servicing school or organization. All these constituted to the content of the reflective journal, and the write up should reflect the awareness to the use of Chinese language by the student himself.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are four themes for students to focus on in the reflective journal: personal growth, collaboration with team members, the teaching practice, and serving others. Most student reviewed their personal growth as well as the awareness of the needs of the ethnic minorities. Many of them expressed the comfort they found in team work and the insights they gained in this kind of teaching. Those who took our advice to start taking log from the first lesson and could hand in lesson records punctually were more disciplined and thoughtful, and earned more eventually. Here are some translated quotes from the students:

“We have prepared several activities for the first lesson (in a school) hoping to give the students a good impression. However, we could only done half of what we have planned and the class was a chaos.....I wish I could start over (in a NGO course which started three weeks later), but things did not go our way. From students’ learning difference to the crowdedness of classroom setting, it was just not a lesson in my expectation. However, didn’t the lecturers tell us to be prepared for all these? Resilience is what we need.....” (Siu Wai, 2015)

“When the lecturers pointed out the problem (at the end of the first lesson), I thought hard about it: I wanted to set the rules, but I also want the students to learn happily, so I changed my tone and smiled more in the following lessons, and students reacted positively..... knew this project is very demanding and I was afraid that I cannot handle the workload, but the lecturer helped me solved the problems.I never thought I could establish a good relationship with these students, I never thought I could gain much happiness because of their attentive in class, I never thought I could complete all the teaching work and gained trust and friendship with my groupmates, I would not regret taking this subject”. (Nga Yan, 2016)

“In the teaching practice, I started by teaching them what I think

was suitable for students and eventually learned to select materials according to their interests and life experience.I realized that I don't need to provide too many examples, just a few typical ones and that let students try to use them in their expression to check their understanding. I had wanted to be a teacher from young and the service teaching gave me a precious chance to examine my wish. It is really not easy to be a teacher, but I had a memorable experience, and I would remind myself to do better in the future.” (Tsz Ki, 2017)

“I could not get into a university (in the first place) because my Chinese is weak, but I chose a service project that needs to teach Chinese just because the service locations are convenient.the course plan we presented was said to be loose and unclear, but the comments were to the point. I don't know when I fell for my students. They acted naturally all the time. They doze off because they could not understand, they laugh because the class was fun.There was an assessment on my teaching in lesson 6, so I worked hard to prepare for that and the response was overwhelming, from students and groupmates. I found the “me” in the Associate Degree days. Your attitude determines your altitude, I reckon.” (Yiu Fai, 2018)

6. CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

The students of this subject are not language majors. The way they learn Chinese is mainly from school settings and as first language. They thought they understand what they prepared to teach, but when it comes to teaching the ethnic minority children, they found themselves inadequate in many areas. We did not design the course to train up teachers of Chinese instantly, we hoped that students could look at the learning of Chinese in a more active manner, we wanted them to be aware of the situation the ethnic minorities face in Hong Kong especially when language is so important in daily life and societal upward movement. We are glad to find that most of our students matured in one way or more. As teachers, we also learn from our teaching, and reflect on students' performance to find ways of improvement. The assessment methods we adopted are reflective of the work of students, and the reflective journal is a good way of summing up the students' experience.

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