

# Joel Michael Pope

## Final Reflection on Teaching

### (Moreland University Teacher Certification, Module 8, Unit 12)

Continual reflection, learning and development are things we do throughout our teaching career. I have four and a half years teaching experience now, three in an English language training center and one and half in bilingual kindergartens. I have been growing throughout this time with the support and input from many others. While my clinical practice has only been three months of this time, the feedback, supporting rubric and deep reflections have been hugely beneficial in supporting me and I am very thankful to have been through it, as well as the whole Moreland program.

A big lesson I have learned is the importance of managing the volume of content during any one class, activity, or period of interaction with students. This has come up in previous personal reflections and feedback discussions. As part of my development here, I have put a much bigger focus on thinking of clear objectives and of working around these. This has gone beyond classes, to include everything down to small on the spot and individual interactions with students, where I might be supporting them with simply a life skill or expressing a thought or need in English. I have become more aware the volume of information or action that might be appropriate in one go, and of and of the focus, emphasis and time that may needed on one new piece of knowledge or information, or skill practice, so that a learning opportunity is not lost.

I have also learnt of the importance of various formative assessments in providing fast data on your

students. While open observation of student play and activities is hugely beneficial and can support you in getting to know your students on a deeper level, allowing them to follow natural and personalized learning pathways, and is in line with my passion for play-based and student emergent learning for younger students, it can be beneficial to incorporate more specific and objective assessments in order to obtain clear data.

Leading on from this, and as mentioned in previous reflections and my personal development plan, I am beginning to place more emphasis not only on how I can develop learning centres to not only meet student interests, but also specific student learning and development needs.

With regards to how I have grown professionally as a teacher, a possible point is my interaction with students. I have spoken a little throughout my tone of voice, and concluded, with my mentor, that perhaps sometimes I overthink this. At the very least, watching myself teach has made me much more aware of how I might be coming across both to students and other observers. Even in the moment, it is as though I am watching myself live on camera. This has benefits both for my presentation and clarity in teaching of content, delivering of instructions, and how I might be coming across in terms of being warm and nurturing. With regards to the tone of voice, I do believe that even very young students of the age I teach should be spoken to with respect, just as you would talk to anyone. I worried that maybe this makes me come across too serious. My mentor made the good point however, that this isn't necessarily the case. It is the words you use that sometimes you may need to consider more carefully.

On the other side, sometimes when I am playing with students, I perhaps act too childlike myself in my persona and interaction. This is only because I genuinely like being with young children and interacting with on their level. There is nothing wrong with this to an extent, especially with such young students.

In fact, I also think it can be an important factor in being a great educator of young children. However, at the same time, it is important to remember boundaries and that you are their teacher, not only their friend, and not their parent. While it is important to support and be part of student's play and self-initiated activities, it is important to remember that you still need to be fully aware of safety, time management, what expectations of parents for example might be for example (to also guide students in understanding these things). Of course, it is not that I was previously unprofessional or irresponsible here. It is only that in the last few months have made me more aware of this. I have learnt more clearly how you can be a genuine part of children's play, while not taking over or destroying it, while still being an adult and staying aware of outside factors. While this is not an area of my interaction with students that has been captured in my teaching videos, reflecting and observing myself during the clinical practice period has helped me here, so I include it.

When you change your role as a teacher from director, to instructor, to facilitator, to co-learner, to playing with students, the interaction, dynamic and expectations will be different. It is important to remember that especially young students may need support and reminding to develop this routine. Similarly, the last months have made me more aware of this.

As a final point on this note, it is important to remember that young students will be very responsive to your persona. If you are acting with great energy, they are very likely to follow you. Of course, this is a great way to work with and capture the attention of young learners in many situations. However, at the same time, if you do need students to relax and settle, modelling the required persona can be important. Likewise, children learn much through the behavior of those they are surrounded by. Hence, it is important to not only show students how to behave in different situations, but to be modelling said behavior yourself at all times, whether it be how you interact with others, how you use different

resources and the school environment and how you conduct yourself in different situations.

I have been developing myself here throughout my time working with young learners, and watching myself teach has supported my awareness.

From a professionalism viewpoint also, becoming familiar and working with the standards as an outline of research based practice, has been hugely beneficial. I have begun to be thinking about them at all times and how I can be showing them across all areas of my practice, whether it being ensuring activities to support all areas of development as often as possible, deeper thinking questions, cross disciplinary activities and real-world problem discussions, as well as fun and easy assessments. In this sense, they, as the broad behaviors of strong teaching practice are growing towards becoming second nature and, help naturally inform my actions.

With regards to meeting the needs of tomorrows learners, a key need really is learning how to learn for the rapidly changing world, as well as the ability to be flexible and creative. This was something I had previously considered much in my teaching practice, allowing lots of different opportunities for creativity and exposing students to different skills. During my time working at my new school and hence the clinical practice period, observing my co-teachers, it has been beautiful to watch the different learning experiences they have introduced in their classes, even when these have been more teacher led and initiated. On reflection, I see that it is important to balance freedom, play and more open creativity, with arranging more organized experiences, even for young learners. After all, young learners do only have a small number of years of life experience, and they will benefit from your support in gaining new experiences that could initiate new ideas and even interests. Even only from songs or stories I have done with my students, I have over the recent months, observed them to then go away

and do self-initiated creative work inspired by this.

Hence for tomorrow's learners, I think it will be important to balance the providing of real world experiences, especially related to the changing world, as well as the natural world, with opportunities for creativity using different materials and means, giving students the opportunity to learn and experience these independently. This is alongside support with communication and social skill development, and problem solving for learning how to learn.

With regards to how my clinical practice specifically has benefitted my student's performance, I actually think the data collection section of the module was hugely beneficial. This guided me to think about specific targets for my student's development in English language production and to plan strategies both to support them during whole group sessions, small group sessions, and individual interactions, as well as to have (flexible as necessary) targets. As a result, I have balanced allowing students to develop English naturally through comprehensible input and experience, as you would your first language, with more structured support. This has helped see growth in the English language communication skills of all my students and we are very thankful to have the support of this experience.

Similarly, in thinking about differentiated assessment and check in with students, both as a result of my own planning and feedback, all students are now supported to participate during whole group time, and also to have work incorporating support and assessment personalized to them, for example in the artwork we did for my fourth teaching video. I now strive to incorporate this on a more regular basis. For example, in the last week, I had individual discussions with all students on a piece of winter art work.

Going forward, as I work to make learning centers more personalized and specific to student learning

needs, I hope that this will have continual benefit for my students.

Video 3 was also beneficial in providing the opportunity to discuss social skills proactively and in more depth, and it has been beautiful to watch students continually show development here, also with further discussions we have had and ongoing practical support and opportunity to work together.

It has been wonderful to see the development of both my students' social and language skills in only the few months since September. At the beginning of the year, I thought it might be a long time before we were able to have open discussions in English and for me to elicit in depth content and ideas both with regards to more specific learning material and social ideas and behaviors. It has been another humbling reminder to always believe in young children.

As a final point, I have also been reminded again not to be too hard on myself, to be patient and not to underestimate the impact I might be having. Sometimes it does take time. In September and October, I was worried about the progress I was seeing, and was continuously reflecting on new or different things I should do, many of which I admittedly didn't try. However, over the recent two months, it has been warming to see many of my students open up and show development in skills, ideas, character, and especially confidence and English language skills. While it is of course always important to reflect and consider what you could do differently, remember that what you are doing may well be having a great impact, and it is important for student centered learning, to let students develop naturally.