

Proposal for reflection on a critical incident

1: Anecdote

“Get started and I wish you all good luck!”, I exclaimed in an attempt to motivate my Year 11/12 class members for Part 2 of the “IT: Databases” test, knowing that boredom could get to them otherwise. Most students – including myself ten years ago – regard databases as being very useful but painfully boring to study.

These students raced through the initial stages of the test, probably looking forward to wrapping it up quickly. Midway through the hour, I fielded a few complaints that Microsoft Access “locks up when creating new fields today”. “Yeah, that's because you didn't import the spreadsheet correctly in the first place”, is what I felt like retorting. However, noting that it wasn't the best time for a slice of floccinaucinihilipilificatious arrogance, I instead issued a general statement suggesting that those encountering this problem should reconsider their initial spreadsheet importation strategy. After further observation, I selected the sledgehammer a few minutes later, continuing that “If you can't quite remember how we imported a spreadsheet into Access last week, you can always just create a new table and enter the supplied data in manually”.

“The belief that a teacher shows in a student can indeed transform the student” (van Manen, 1999, p. 18). One or both of my statements nailed it home for some students, who proceeded to pass Part 2 of the test. The remaining three in this

uncertain cluster decided against taking my advice, possibly due to reluctance caused by partial disbelief that the diagnosis was correct. At this point, I was hit by the striking fact that those who'd given a strong effort during the previous (revision) lesson were the same ones who generally succeeded in this area of the test. Who would've dreamt that a correlation could be so linear? Possibly not those two who thought that reading a novel was a good way to prepare for a test about databases.

2: Analysis

In the moments prior to issuing my two buoyancy-inducing statements, I was conflicted about the ethical implications of such a move. I could not recall a situation from my own schooling days when the teacher spoon-fed half of the tub to students during a test. This situation differed slightly because the small number of students concerned were to be disadvantaged later in the test due to their elementary misjudgement.

The executive decision about whether to proceed with the statements was fully mine because my mentoring teacher was away on the day. His substitute was quite capable but lacked familiarity with the nature of this test due to his unanticipated call-up. After I quietly provided him with details of the (confined) dilemma in less technical terms, I sensed his sadness for those few students who had initially forked onto that terminal path. I regarded his opinion highly but also allowed time to consider what my mentoring teacher might do in this situation. I concluded that he would not want such a trivial mistake to blacken a larger section of the test, and decided to offer my first suggestion before briefly noting

its effects. After all, teachers should respond with empathy to students (Education Queensland, n.d., SC3: p. 15), showing that they are accepting of the students' perspectives (Emmer, Evertson & Worsham, 2000, n.p.).

Some of the affected students began to recall or research an alternative spreadsheet importation method, while others did not seem to take the hint. Education Queensland (n.d.) notes that teacher expectations can have an impact on their students (SC2: p. 14). MCEETYA (1999) adds that by “providing a supportive and nurturing environment, schooling contributes to the development of students' sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future” (Preamble). After a few minutes of watching these remaining students continuing to struggle, I decided to further support them by providing a more obvious solution to their dilemma. I am glad that I offered both levels of support because Education Queensland (n.d.) hopes that beginning teachers will use “assertiveness techniques appropriate to the context”, timely responsiveness and “a range of communication strategies” that value the individual and group (SC3: p. 15). I feel that these values are especially applicable during a summative test, due to the extra pressure imposed on the students.

As expected, my mentor supported my decisions upon hearing this anecdote. After reviewing the test, he noted that the importation question was fairly worded and that these few students should have either: remembered the identical demonstration and exercise from a lesson in the previous week; reverted to the fall-back manual data entry option upon hearing my second suggestion. As it stands, the class average for Part 2 was 19 out of 30 so the affected students were in the minority. A few days later, my generous mentor permitted these students to resit Part 2 with a maximum allowed result of 50%. I will inspect and

grade these recent submissions tomorrow.

Word Count ~ 800 ~ +0%

3: References

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- MCEETYA (1999). *The Adelaide declaration on national goals for schooling in the twenty-first century*. Retrieved on Aug 24, 2007, from the MCEETYA website: <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/nationalgoals/index.htm>
- van Manen, M. (1999). "The language of pedagogy and the primacy of student experience", in Loughran (ed.) *Researching teaching: Methodologies and practices for understanding pedagogy* (pp. 13-27).