

## **Journal Entry on Personal Biases, Impacts, and How to Address Them**

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In creating the policy proposal for this assignment, I formulated the idea of a writing centre for the sister school of the school at which I work. In doing this, I noted the importance of listening to students requests for what they would like support with, not trying to give support, as teachers, on what we might think is important based on our own lives and views. If students want support with grammar, we respect that. If they want support enhancing the overall communicative feel of their work, we respect that. We do after all only know so much detail. Many factors could affect what is important for a student at this moment. They are also receiving support and enrichment from multiple places. To ensure that personal biases or opinions didn't get in the way here, I made it part of the writing centre's philosophy to listen to and support students as they are desiring.

This process made me aware of biases I may well have. I reflect here on these biases, their impact and my plan to address them.

A key area I need to consider is similar to the motivation behind this philosophy of the writing centre. It is about not allowing what might be of importance or interest to me on a personal level impact what I think could be important for my students.

I remember, early in my teaching career, I was working as a private tutor, principally in science and math and at the secondary level. Many students were preparing for public examinations, for example GCSE's and A-Levels in the UK. I was very interested in these subjects myself from a more theoretical level – a level of understanding. Wanting to share this passion, I put a big focus on these in my tutoring sessions. On reflection now however, what I occasionally overlooked was that, really, what students were looking for was more practical support on how to use techniques to answer questions or carry out tasks. This was both understandable and rightly so as they were preparing for important exams. It is a big and separate discussion on teaching for understanding and mastery, over teaching for tests and knowledge. Mastery, understanding and theory are important. However, they can develop over time. The key point here is that I wasn't necessarily focusing on what they might have needed or wanted at the time.

Working now in early years, similar scenarios do occur. I am myself, very much a thoughtful and introverted person. I realize that I do sometimes expect this of my students and perhaps put too big a focus on discussion and thinking. Many types of people are much more practical and hands on than me, needing to do and see things, especially young learners. For many, there does need to be a focus on such activities, even if it was not so much the case for me now or even when I was a child.

I am very thankful that this assignment and the process of developing the idea for the writing centre and considering its philosophy have inspired my deeper reflection on these areas.

With regards to my plan for addressing this, the key action I want to take is to spend time creating a needs assessment for each of my students. This can be done in collaboration with my co-teachers. It will focus both on students' goals and their preferences for exploring and learning. This can then be used in planning. In doing this, I will get input from students and their parents as necessary. The upcoming start of the new

school year marks a very appropriate time for doing this, where whole class and individual student discussions can take place. Thereafter, it is a process I would like to continue.

I will ensure to return to the needs assessments and reflect on their implementation regularly. I will check in with students also and ask for honest feedback from my co-teachers.

Considering how this would transfer over to the teaching of writing, as I am elsewhere, I am a very thoughtful person when it comes to writing. This means that when I am writing myself, I will write slowly, planning my sentences carefully. Looking back at work with older students I have previously done, reflecting now, as a teacher I have attempted to slow students down and make them think more than might be beneficial for them because doing so is a preference for me in my own writing process. This might not have been most effective for students who might need to be more active in planning.

To overcome barriers to effective practice that could arise here, I will again use needs assessments. I will reflect on the needs of individual students and the support they might require. I will ask for their input and seek support and advice from other teachers if necessary. Often with writing, it is the case that students might need to develop their ability to slow down a little and plan. However, based on the conclusions from the needs assessment, I could support them to find methods for this that might be more suited to them. This could include drawing ideas or writing notes or even speaking ideas out loud.

Another writing specific bias that has caused me challenges in the past is with regards to style of writing. In my own writing, I often prefer a more monologue style, with lots of commas and longer sentences, additional details and markers. This comes very much from writing being my way of thinking out loud, as well as my thoughtful nature. It contrasts with other styles that might be more concise and to the point. I have run into professional differences and disagreements over this when working on joint writing assignments with others in the past. I acknowledge that while elaborate, my style may also be overly wordy and hence lack clarity for readers.

The point for my teaching however is that I should continue to be cautious to not favour a specific writing style. My plan for supporting older students with writing in this regard is hence to look at the overall writing and the message it puts across. In many cases, different styles can work. As per the writing centre's philosophy, I will discuss with the students what their personal goals are and look at overall enhancements that could support the writing at meeting its purpose. Only when the style might be inappropriate for the task or purpose at hand should it be looked at. Then it should be kept about the task, however. I will help the student to see the merits of the writing style they have used and when it would be appropriate. Then we would explore why it is not most appropriate in this case and possible alternatives they could look at.

A smaller point for writing biases is related to handwriting. At primary school, I was taught to write in cursive. I was also led to believe that this represented a higher skill at handwriting, only to find at my secondary school, I was the only one who had learnt to write like that. Many years later as an English teacher, I learnt that cursive was more difficult for the early readers I was teaching, to read. I have now learnt to write with letters disjoint, possibly even having a bias towards that style now.

To prevent this from impacting my teaching, my plan as a teacher is to clearly communicate to students that both handwriting styles are alternatives and are equal, even if they may see one more. They could come across both, and different subvarieties of each in their lives. While disjoint letters might be the focus in my current context initially, I will provide them experience with reading and writing in both styles.

As a final point, I look at how students and all of us express ourselves. This relates to my Reggio-Emilia background, and passion about ideas of one hundred languages of children. As I have hinted above, for me, writing is a big preference for method to express myself. As a teacher, I will need to remember, especially in early years that while students will need to learn how to write, it is only one way to express ourselves, and

many will have other preferences. To ensure I am allowing students to shine and having the opportunity to express themselves naturally, I will return to needs assessments.

To conclude then, as we all do, I have my own experiences and preferences, and these can naturally lead to biases. The important thing is to become aware of these and make plans to ensure they do not impact our teaching or work. A key feature of my plan for the coming year in terms of addressing this is needs assessments and continually reflecting and returning to these, to ensure students' individual needs and learning preferences are being catered for. Other teachers and individuals can be asked for guidance and feedback as necessary. As an individual, I will continue to strive to think and reflect openly and honestly.