

Tom's Reflective Log

My Work Placement at ACME Community School

Week 1

The school I chose to work at was ACME Community School. The school is open 7 days a week and is very popular in the local area and boasts successful pass rates at both GCSE and A-Level. The school pass rates at both GCSE and A-Level have improved significantly over the last 5 years. With these figures ever improving, the school definitely has a fantastic future. Before I began my first week on the placement I was slightly nervous, as I had never worked in a school before. I was given a timetable at the start of the day, which I would stick to until the end of my placement. Throughout the day I worked with classes from Year 8 to 6th Form which would be the case every week. During the lessons, some subjects were covered which I knew a lot about such as the Holocaust and the First World War, which gave me more confidence in my ability to aid the pupils with their work. A challenging part of the day for me was when a supply teacher took charge of the Year 9 class I was in. This was a different experience to the other classes I had been in. The class were a lot louder and had to be pointed in the right direction for most of the lesson. But by the end of the lesson, most of the pupils had completed the work that had been set for them.

Week 2

I was a lot more confident about going into the school this week. I started the day in a Year 10 lesson. The subject being covered was Winston Churchill and Gallipoli. As this is the topic of my Independent Study at university, I was very confident in offering my assistance to the pupils if they needed any help. During the 6th Form class I was advised by my mentor to talk to the class about the coursework they will have to complete as I had done this several years previous. I shared my experiences with them of the coursework and tried to give them some pointers as to how to undertake the task. I also talked to them about uni and what prospects there are of them applying. None of the pupils I spoke to said that they were thinking of applying to a History course at uni which disappointed me slightly. I also took part in a 6th Form class which was being taught by a supply teacher. The class were not as loud as the Year 9 class from the previous week as they were older but they were still not responsive to instructions from the teacher as they would have been with their normal teacher.

Week 3

I had been setting myself “homework” in the previous weeks and would have to in the weeks following as many of the subjects being covered were topics that I had not covered since I was at school, so I had to refresh my memory. I had started to notice the different teaching techniques such as in a Year 10 class, they sat in a seating plan and the pupils were pretty much silent and completed work promptly. I could identify immediately that the teacher was very experienced. This differed in classes that were being taught by younger, less experienced teachers as the pupils sat where they wanted which meant they were a lot louder and didn’t complete work as swiftly. I had to use a different aspect of my qualities during an exam with the Year 10 class. It was an “in-class assessment” and I was asked to sit with 2 pupils that found it hard concentrate. I had to make sure they were concentrating and getting on with the assessment. I found it hard to keep them focussed on their task but both of them did complete the test by the end of the lesson. I also found it harder to make myself useful in the 6th Form class than I did with the younger pupils. As they are older I think that they were more reluctant to talk to me and did not need as much help, they just got on with their work in silence.

Week 4

This was the first week back after the half term break and I observed that the pupils were not as focussed on school work as they normally would be. As I am getting more familiar with the pupils now, they are starting to seek my help a lot more. The Year 10 class started a new topic which was the Post-War Labour Government, 1945-51. I completed an essay on this topic in my 1st Semester this year so am very familiar with the topic. Although I am familiarised more now with the 6th Form class, they are older they do not seek as much help as the younger pupils; they just get on with their work as I struggle to make myself feel as useful. I did talk to them about the exams they have coming up and shared my experiences of exams when I was in 6th Form. They were also starting to talk about the exclusion of certain groups of people in 1930s Germany in preparation for next week’s fieldtrip to Beth Shalom, The Holocaust Centre, near Newark in Nottinghamshire.

Week 5

This week I was with 6th Form classes for most of the day and most of the subjects they were studying were those that I studied when I was in 6th Form, three years ago. I had to refresh my memory about the subjects but I feel confident that I would be able to offer my assistance if needed. I was with my mentor for all of the lessons throughout the day except for one. I believe that she is a great teacher as she makes the lessons enjoyable for the pupils but also commands respect from them at the same time. This is how I would want to be if I decide to go into teaching in the future. She had some pupils present a PowerPoint presentation to the rest of the class in one lesson which I believe is better for them to learn from every once in a while, rather than a teacher doing the same things every lesson. As I worked with 6th Form classes almost all day, I spoke to them about coursework and also about the prospects of them going to University as I could talk of my own experience but they did not often need help with the work they were asked to complete.

Week 6

This week there was the trip to Beth Shalom for Lower 6th Form which I was asked to on. Once we arrived at the centre, the pupils were given a lecture about the Holocaust. After the talk the pupils were given the chance to look around the exhibition which had many Holocaust related artefacts from this period. It gave me the chance to interact with the pupils about this subject and allow them to ask me any questions they had if they were unsure about anything. After that they were given the chance to hear the story of Hans Freeman who had come to Britain on a Kindertransport in March 1939. Hans talked about experience of saying goodbye to his parents at the Berlin train station not knowing at the time he would never see them again. He used humour to describe culture shock. "They tried to poison me with a vile brown liquid at Liverpool Street Station. After all these years I still hate tea." After the talk, the pupils were given the chance to ask Mr. Freeman any questions they had. It gave the pupils a great insight into the suffering of the Jewish people from the perspective of a six year old refugee child – as Hans was in March 1939. It will definitely help them with their History course but it was a fantastic experience as well. His story also inspired me and I took a lot from the experience.

Week 7

The pupils are very identifiable to me now. I now know most of their names and they talk to me as they would with other members of staff. Most of them are not shy to ask for my help which makes me feel more comfortable in the classes and clearly means they are more comfortable around me. The 6th Form class seem the most reluctant class to ask for my help whereas the Year 9 class are the most questioning. I think that there are a number of reasons for this. The older classes have more knowledge of the subject as well as the fact that the younger classes are a lot less shy than the older pupils. The Year 11 class that I work with are now studying the Holocaust which is an area of history that I am very interested in and I am very knowledgeable about. This gives me a lot more confidence in offering my help to the pupils. In this class I have been working closely with two pupils that struggle to remain focussed on the tasks they are set. This is a different challenge for me and is sometimes tough, as they do not seem interested at all when they are sat together. But when I sit with them one to one, they are very responsive and attempt the task in hand immediately.

Week 8

An interesting lesson was the one with the 6th Form. They were told to come up with arguments about who was to blame for the division of Germany after the Second World War, then had to have a debate on the topic. It was very interesting for me to see the difference in behaviour and the gulf in the level of knowledge between the Lower 6th Form and Year 11 pupils even though there is only one year's difference between them. The debate seemed very intellectual and above the level that I was expecting. I also really enjoy working with the Year 9 pupils. They are very inquisitive about the subject and are the class which I feel most comfortable around due to the way they make me feel needed in the class. This makes me think that maybe I should consider a career within Primary Schools rather than Secondary Schools, which is what I had thought previously.

Week 9

The 6th Form lesson this week was more like a university lecture than a normal lesson. There was a presentation and a Q & A session on how the East German government was created and imposed upon the people after the Second World War. As I had never covered this subject before I was also an interested spectator and enjoyed watching the teaching styles of my mentor.

Everyone in the class understood the subject by the end of the lesson which impressed me as it was a very complex subject to understand and I think this was due to the teaching styles that my mentor used and the way she conveyed the information to the class. In the Year 9 class they had to watch a video on the Battle of Marston Moor. The class seemed to gain a lot from this as they seemed more interested in a video than they would have been being taught in a 'normal' way. I remember when I was at school I would have been more interested in a video than listening to a teacher. It is not something which should be done in every lesson as it neglected certain information, but it is certainly a change for the pupils and may give them a different and better insight into certain aspects of history. This is something I will remember if I decide to go into teaching.

Week 10

I got the chance to work with the top set of Year 9 this week. I immediately noticed the difference between this class and the other Year 9 class that I had been working with. This class were more responsive and seemed to have more knowledge of the subject. They were still inquisitive and were not apprehensive about asking for help if they were having difficulties. This makes me believe that I would definitely be more comfortable working with younger pupils in the future and leads me to believe that I should gain some experience working in a Primary School to see if I would be more comfortable in that environment. The only drawback of that is that History is my specialist subject whereas every subject needs to be taught in a Primary School although that shouldn't be as much of a problem.

Week 11

This was my penultimate week at ACME and I got the chance to work with a teacher that was at the school when my Mum was there! It was interesting to see how teaching techniques differed between this teacher and the younger teachers I had worked with. This teacher was a lot stricter and insisted on working in complete silence whereas the younger teachers were more 'laid-back' and allowed some talking as long as the work was being done. The younger teachers also like to have a joke with the pupils every now and again whereas the older teacher never did that. I think that both teaching styles have their strengths and weaknesses. I think the more laid-back approach while still commanding respect from the pupils is my preferred option, as the pupils will like you more, which would make them more responsive. This is the kind of approach that my mentor takes and I believe that she is the best teacher I have worked with.

Week 12

Friday was my final week at the school. I have gotten to know the pupils I have worked with very well and have a good understanding with the majority of them. I've learnt a lot from my time at the school. I feel that I connected with the younger pupils such as Year 9s and Years 9s a lot better than I did with the older pupils such as the 6th Form. This makes me think that in the future I would be better off working in a Primary School as a teacher rather in a Secondary School. I would like to gain some experience of working in a Primary School in the future before I make this decision for but it is something I will definitely look into. I have learnt a lot from my mentor as she is a great teacher and I think that I can take that into my future career if I decide to go into teaching. I have also learnt different techniques from the other teachers that I have worked with which I will definitely take into future employment.