**OLET1133- Reflection Assignment**

*Reflection on the Critical Incident:*

I have chosen to reflect critically on an experience I had while I was in my teaching placement last year. It is relevant to the graduate quality of cultural competence.

To give context to my reflection, I will give a brief description of the event. During this teaching placement, I was to lead my class as they presented the speeches they had spent the last few lessons working on. Although I had planned the lesson so that each group theoretically had enough time to present, this was not the case. Rather than reflecting-in-action and changing the plan to allow each group the time they needed, I rushed through their presentations and feedback and there were still some groups that did not get a chance to present.

What makes this a critical incident for me is that I was overwhelmed by increasing panic as my plans were thrown awry and my reasons for the lesson became muddled. I could see that the students were becoming more anxious or frustrated as they were unable to show off the work they had put in, and the fact that I couldn’t decide how to fix the issue of time made me feel that I had failed the lesson and by extension, them.

While the lesson certainly became less effective than it could have been, I think that the reason I was so panicked is because I imagined that a failure in the classroom was a catastrophic failure of my character. I believe that teachers should maintain a safe, encouraging environment and to do that, they must be confident and reassuring. I was aware that this is how I should be and that this is how the students would expect me to be as well- because this is how society expects teachers to be even if they’re still learning. I was probably overwhelmed by that belief and couldn’t forgive myself in that situation, so I couldn’t reflect-in-action. This is a gap in my cultural competence- if I become able to separate the expectations I imagine people have of me and the expectations I should realistically have for myself, then I will be able to deal with disappointment much more logically.

Failing to encourage the students for their work in that moment and in fact give feedback to some and not others meant that I was embarrassing them. I think a teacher is in a unique position of power. They’re not just leaders and guides for their students, they’re also a point of reference for their potential and ability. With that power, a teacher can empower or discourage their students, and being a practice teacher doesn’t change that fact. I should feel a level of guilt about this incident, but I should also acknowledge that these beliefs are not sustainable to learning. Although there is a perception of teachers as perfect, inhuman beings, all learners will make mistakes and societal expectation does not change that. I should accept this fact so I can apply it in my further learning. I believe this will also improve my cultural competence as I will be able to make more reasoned and reasonable choices in incidents since they will be less focussed on how I’ve failed the people around me. I need to adjust my expectations to be less reliant on societal beliefs.

I think a lot of the pressure I feel around this incident comes from my history. In my Egyptian culture, there is a heavy impetus to become a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. When I chose to become a teacher, which is (wrongly) perceived to be an “easy” profession, I subconsciously believed this as well. So, when I started to fail at this “easy” profession, I was paralysed by the thought that there was nowhere I could go now. In Egyptian culture, a change in careers is cowardly, so a failure in teaching was not only embarrassing, it was also likely life-defining. Of course, these beliefs are simply amalgamations of negative beliefs I’ve absorbed from authorities in my community. Now I am aiming to subvert these beliefs in those I affect and to adjust my own mindset to improve my cultural competence.

*Reason for Critical Reflection*

I believe that critical reflection was essential for this incident. Although communicative reflection, with its reframing of the incident from another perspective, would have been helpful in exposing my negative mindset, critical reflection’s focus on outside factors dissects the incident more effectively.

As Lucas (2012) shows, critical reflection requires us to scrutinize what caused a situation to occur. In this incident, the blocks to my reflection-in-action (besides inexperience) were a result of how my environmental influences had formed my cultural competence. If I were to reflect on my initial abilities of cultural competence, I would have to admit that they rely on a flawed perception of myself: that if I make a mistake with others then I’ve failed, unacceptably and irreversibly. I especially see relatively small situations as catastrophic failures. This situation, when summarised without my inner dialogue, would be seen as a novice’s simple mistake. But to me, before I applied the framework of critical reflection, this incident was a source of shame and guilt. Not for any reasons that I could not name- but for reasons that I could name all too easily. This is why critical reflection was essential in this incident: because it placed my perspective outside of myself and the people in it and puts it on the society outside it.

Since critical reflection focusses on the emotional aspects to assumptions that affect professional practice (Fook, 2015), in a situation where my emotions had boiled to a point, it is important to investigate what led these emotions to boil in the first place. As my critical reflection revealed, much of my cultural competence has been formed on the pressures which I had absorbed due to perceived societal and environmental expectations. Furthermore, critical reflection’s investigation of the subtle effects of power helped me understand my relationship with power when I had it: that a failure in that situation was both failing the person I wanted to be and the person I’m told to be. So critical reflection has taught me that when I interact with people, I should be aware that cultural competence is not just empathising with others, but also holding your own values and beliefs with enough self-awareness to re-evaluate them if need be. Armed with this knowledge, I can be aware of other situations in which my insecurities boil over, and cool myself down before I get burned.

***Reference List***

Fook, J. (2015). Reflective Practice and Critical Reflection. In Lishman J. (Ed.), *Handbook for Practice Learning in Social Work and Social Care, Third Edition: Knowledge and Theory* (pp. 440-445). Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.sydney.edu.au/lib/usyd/reader.action?docID=2120487&ppg=442>

Lucas, P. (2012). Critical reflection. What do we really mean? *Australian Collaborative Education Network.* <https://www.kenniscentrumtoerisme.nl/images/2/26/92_Critical-reflection.pdf>