

# Separating Personal from Professional: A Reflective Report

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As a person, I have always enjoyed helping people. I do my best to lessen their burden, despite the extra work it gives me, just to make their life a little bit easier. It's my way of spreading positivity, and I have done it since I was a young child.

It does not, however, work well for teaching.

As a teacher, my job is to guide and to facilitate. Students need to come to conclusions and draw connections in order to learn, and if I do that for them, I rob them of their ownership of their learning.

This was the feedback I received in my first few days of Summer School. It was good, in a way, to hear it now. It's something that I need to work on - I need to make "Teacher Jess" a bit of a different person to "Everyday Jess".

I mention the "a bit" part for a reason. I tried implementing the feedback over one period in particular. For that lesson, I attempted to be much more hands-off and allowed the students to take full-reign of their tasks and ideas. The students were given five different texts to analyse, with a worksheet to fill out with the information they found. These texts were rotated every five minutes, giving each student some time to individually examine the piece and answer the questions. I kept track of time, and was available for questions, but otherwise had no interactions with the students until the end of the lesson when we discussed our findings. This didn't work any more than my previous approach had worked. Students were only expressing surface-level ideas during this individual-based task, and the work that they produced lacked the insight necessary to have a good understanding of the topic. I felt that they could have better grasped the topic and thought at a deeper level if they had more input from each other, or myself.

I had gone from one extreme to the other, in a matter of lessons. On Tuesday, I was too interactive, essentially doing the work for my students, and by Wednesday afternoon I felt that I had offered them no help at all. I think that finding a balance between the two is going to be a big challenge for me, but something that is essential to improving my teaching practice.

In my portfolio, I wrote about my struggles with being overbearing in my teaching. And highlighted the underlying message: "I can't guide my students every step of the way if I want them to learn. I need to be demanding of my students if I want them to work hard and achieve

high. I need to give them the ownership of their own learning, and trust them to reach my high expectations without me leading them to every conclusion, answer, and solution along the way.” After I spoke with Natalie Faitala, an experienced teacher from Wesley College, my reflections were confirmed. By “babying” my students, I was indirectly telling them that I didn’t think that they could achieve to the standard that they needed to on their own (personal communication, January 9, 2018). According to Meissel and Rubie-Davies (2016), having high standards for students is essential to raising the self-belief of students, and in turn, students with high self-belief tend to achieve higher than their peers (Whitney et al. for Ministry of Education, 2015). This means that to some extent, I was hindering the growth in the learning of my students, and unconsciously lowering their likelihood of achieving at a high standard.

Another essential part of learning is *ako*, one of the key principles of Ka Hikitia, the Maori Education Strategy for New Zealand. *Ako* describes the act of reciprocal learning - the idea that students and teachers need to be learning from each other, and growing together, for teachers to be most effective (Ministry of Education, 2013). In the situation where I was helping students, almost to the point of where I was doing the task for them, the students were learning from my contributions and experiences, and not the other way around. I need to focus my practice on incorporating input from everyone in the classroom.

I think that despite all this, it’s incredibly important to remember that the focus, in this case, is balance. This report focuses mostly on pulling away from being overbearing in my teaching, but moving away from standoffishness is also significant. Learning in the twenty-first century needs to be about collaborating together to face challenges that may be too substantial to face on your own (ITL Research, 2012). In order to achieve this, the role of the teacher can be to act as a facilitator and guide, instead of an instructor. As a facilitator, the teacher acts as a support, and scaffolds learning, and encourages students to work together to develop their own learning and understanding. It’s also important, however, that the teacher is still available to teach new skills when necessary (Tout, 2016). By observing and working with my students over the year, I will gradually learn how much support each student needs, and provide it to them in the way that will best benefit them.

The New Zealand Education Council has released a series of standards designed to maintain the high quality of teaching in New Zealand. One of these standards relates to establishing high standards for all learners (Graduating teacher Standards: Aotearoa New Zealand, 2008). As a professional teacher, I need to ensure that my standards are clearly demonstrated, and are consciously high for all students in the class. A major part of my dedication to teaching is around the belief that all children deserve to have the opportunity to achieve their dreams, and setting high expectations for all of my students is a key part of that.

There are a number of things that I can do to improve my controlling teaching style. A great way to start is by incorporating a technique known as “I do, we do, you do”. Emma Howden (C16) suggested that I try this as a way to include my natural instinct to help, but also to give the students some room to experiment and problem-solve on their own. This technique works by

demonstrating a task step-by-step to students, with an in depth narration, then performing the task at the same time as students, still with narration and answering questions, and then finally giving the students the opportunity to practice that task individually (personal communication with Emma Howden, January 10, 2018). Another way that I intend to find balance in my teaching style is by adapting my plan template to include a section of student actions and teacher actions for each task of the lesson. That way, I can monitor what I expect myself and student to be doing at any given time, and make sure that I incorporate time for myself to hang back and let the students work. Finally, I'd like to continue reflecting on my lessons after I teach them, taking special notice of times that I felt that I was overbearing and times that I wasn't active enough. By doing this, I can recognise the problem and begin to consciously correct it as I teach future lessons.

I will know that I have struck the right balance in my teaching style by several indicators. The first is through my own observation of my students. When I can see my learners collaborating well in group work, and coming up with insightful comments and ideas on their own, I will know that I have given them the space to develop their own learning. External observers who come into my class will be able to observe me stepping back from being consistently with my students during lessons, and they will remain engaged in the task.

Modifying my teaching practice isn't about changing who I am, it's about separating my personal and professional personas to better serve my students. I aim to become the best teacher I can be, and the teacher that my students deserve. I believe that through reflection and hard work, I can make that dream a reality.

# References

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