I was placed at the Pembroke Hall High School for a two weeks teaching practice for the period from November 6-17, 2017. For the first two days of the two weeks I got the opportunity to observe my cooperation teacher Ms. White in action before I taught for a class by myself. I was timetabled for seven classes between grade seven to nine to whom I taught Library Skills. The sessions ran for forty minutes and most of the classes were after lunch. The morning classes are often well executed, however, the classes after lunch tend to require more attention.

The class sizes range from approximately 38 students to 43 students. The learning styles of the student population very diverse, some students even possess multiple intelligence. The classrooms spacing is enough in size for the number of students enrolled. There are designer blocks on both side of the classroom which are used as a means of air conditioning. There are individual desks and chairs for each student, which enable them to be comfortable during the hours of teaching.

I was extremely nervous about embarking upon this new journey for the first time and even considered if this was the profession I really wanted to be in. Observing my cooperating teacher in action was very discouraging as the students were not very receptive towards her. I worried on the first day of observation that this would be my faith. I then felt some relieve on the second observation day when I realize that the teaching technique used was the problem and not always the students. I then started thinking of ways I could make my lessons interactive and engaging enough for students, in order to grab the students’ attention at the beginning and maintain it throughout the entire session.

The planning process was tedious and time consuming. Over the two weeks I did not sleep for eight hours any night. I had to be up making charts or Powerpoints. I was exhausted most days but I had to put my best out there. I started thinking of all teachers and the stress they have to go through each day and even weekends, while with most careers, the work finish at work. Being a teacher is different, you are always thinking about work and reflecting on what went well and what did not, so that you can prepare better next time. A part from planning lessons as a teacher, I had to ensure that the learning environment of my students were safe and productive.

When I started teaching for on my own I established an atmosphere of trust, openness, and mutual respect by respecting and incorporating students’ ideas, keeping communication between the students and myself open, and giving them the opportunities that demonstrated that I trusted them. I like the fact that the classrooms were spacious, and the students were comfortable. This enabled me to focus most of my time on executing my lessons. However, one downfall for my experience was that the outside environment was very loud, especially after lunch. Students got distracted by the traffic on the corridor and the profanities coming from their school mates’ mouth. However, the use of various classroom management techniques allows the outside environment not to disrupt the classes too much.

I utilized various classroom management techniques, some of which I did not realize I was using until after the fact. I used the non-verbal communication technique in every class as a part of my daily routine. I use this method to save time and energy. I used it to get a class quiet and attentive by using the finger over my lips to make the shh sound. According to *Treasure the silence: Using non-verbal cues to manage behaviours* (2009), the use of non-verbal cues aid in motivating “on task” behaviours and stop “off task” behaviours. This enables for more time “on task” which leads to more time teaching and learning. When done effectively, non-verbal cues include teacher gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and proximity. I use these daily in each class. I do this so that instructions are not disrupted by issues such as taking, daydreaming, distracting others and playing with supplies etc.

I had a class with a young man that believes it is satisfying to distract others with excessive talking. I used eye contact repeatedly and as soon as my eyes are on the rest of the class, would he strike again. I then began walking around and stood beside his seat and he stopped. I knew I could not stand there for the rest of the class so I had to ask him to relocate to the front of the class where he could be close to me. He was not happy about the decision and when to the front where he had no one to idle with or have off task conversations. He was forced to get on track and complete the task. This method was used in more than one class and has proven itself to be successful. However, there was this one boy who is very social; he knows everyone in the class, therefore, moving him was a waste. I had to improvise and told him I will give him a demerit if he continues and that calmed him down enough for me to finish executing the lesson. Whenever I am successful at managing behaviour and execution of my lessons I feel I am in control of my class.

Another classroom management technique that I used during my placement was praise. I encourage on task behaviours by praising the students. I do not get carried away with the excitement of praising because I believe in moderation and if I praise too much it will lose its meaning. According to Linsin (2010), ‘*For praise to be effective, for it to ignite motivation, influence behavior, and steer students toward excellence, it must be meaningful. It must stir something inside their hearts that makes them want to get better’.* I had a 9 grade class, which I taught only once; they were so well behaved. There was a student in the class who was finding it difficult to connect the lesson to relief situation and another student offered to give an example, which I was not thinking of that made it so simple and perfect I was smiling from ear to ear. I had to pull him aside after class and said “youth you know you have potential” and he smiled. This made me feel a sense of purpose.

Linsin (2010) suggested four ways in which teachers can make their praises hit the mark. These are: **Make it private-** Giving praise privately is more effective than doing it in front of the class; it’s best to keep it between the two of you. **Make it subtle-**[small gestures of praise](http://www.smartclassroommanagement.com/2009/05/25/small-gestures-of-praise-can-make-a-big-impact/) are powerful. Eye contact and a smile from across the room. **Make it worthy-**only offer praise when you notice them doing something that is beyond what is a common classroom expectation. **Make it sincere-** praise won’t have its desired effect unless you’re genuinely proud of your student(s). These are a few suggestions I used to guide my experience in the classroom.

I have room for growth not only in classroom management but in other areas. This two weeks experience was an eye opener. From planning lessons to sourcing materials made me tired and exhausted. However, I appreciate that the cooperating teacher and the students appreciate my efforts in taking a new approach to teaching. Doing this course has helped me to grow as an emerging teacher and at my next placement I am looking forward to utilizing all that I have learned and experienced. My next placement will be for three months, which will enable me to get more familiar with the students and their interest, which in turn will aid me in delivering better relatable activities and assessments.

References

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