



National College of Art and Design
A Recognised College of University College Dublin

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NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN
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SCHOOL OF EDUCATION 2018-19

Reflection on 4th Year School Placement
Joint (Hons.) BA in Fine Art and Education

OVERALL EVALUATION OF 4Yr School Placement

St. Vincent's Secondary school is a C.E.I.S.T. school for girls in the centre of Dundalk town with an enrolment of approximately 1000 pupils in 2018. The school has excellent facilities such as two computer rooms, a gallery and three well-resourced art rooms. There is a huge emphasis on extracurricular activities and an amazing culture of creativity throughout the school. The attitude and support towards the art department from every level in the school community is reflected in the pupils' environment where great art from both junior and senior cycle is hung everywhere.

I realised in this placement that my strength in the classroom is questioning. My favourite moments were when I was talking to a pupil during a presentation or evaluation and through rephrasing or rethinking a question they would get a breakthrough. I enjoyed being the person who gets to help someone with that, to provide the opportunity to go beyond what they themselves thought they knew. Why I think I enjoyed this placement so much was because of these little moments of collaboration that gave pupils a moment of personal success. Discussion and questioning were methodologies that I mindfully used throughout my lessons and because of this assessment for learning was very much intertwined and integral to the pupils experience in the classroom. I came to understand and appreciate the impact having good visual aids have in the classroom when I saw how pupils responded and worked with and without them. Pupils were more engaged when we were discussing or analysing visually interesting resources that were right in front of them than they were with images on a PowerPoint. Investing time into my visual aids definitely made both the pupils' and my experience better as it not only demonstrated the success criteria and made tasks clear but also encouraged pupils to push themselves to a similar high quality.

During this placement I experienced teaching both junior and senior cycle pupils. In block one I approached all the classes in similar ways however after a couple weeks I noticed that the senior cycle pupils weren't responding to certain teaching methodologies the way the junior cycle pupils were. I therefore adapted my approach: I learned to step back more with the 5th years, that giving them space to work independently and the time to come across their own obstacles and solutions worked much more effectively and organically than with the 1st years classes where I felt everything had to be very controlled and organised in order

to work effectively. I learned that while the 1st years needed worksheets, small tasks and varied resources to learn best, the 5th years needed good demonstrations, good visual aids and time to work themselves. Differentiation was something I worked on, especially in block 2 with my 5th Year Still Life class. I found that trying to keep everyone on the same page benefited no one and so I allowed the class to move at different paces. Despite finding it difficult at the beginning I found this way of teaching much more rewarding – I've learned how to accommodate having groups of pupils at different stages of a project but still maintain a sense that it is one class.

At the beginning of this placement I would have found it very difficult to walk into a classroom that I hadn't prepared for however now I'm more confident in my ability to adapt and change a scheme or lesson when it needs to and to think on my feet.

I have become even more aware of the responsibilities that come from being a figure of authority in a classroom during this placement: that I can influence how a young person feels or thinks, whether it be for that 40 minute class or for years to come. What this placement gave me was the time to continually develop and put into practice the kind of teaching that I can be proud of. I've shown myself that I can engage with young people, that I can empathise and be fair while also sustaining a strong work ethic in the classroom. I enjoyed simple things like greeting pupils in the hallway or asking them how they're getting on as they came in and got settled for the lesson.

I learned early on in this placement, through observing my host teachers, that pupils deserve a teacher who is first and foremost kind: that being organised or a brilliant artist is irrelevant if you don't have the ability to see when someone in your class is struggling, or under pressure and then have the ability to act in a way that improves their situation or eases stress. Going forward I hope to uphold what I've learned - to see when someone needs to be giving a break or another chance. I want to go from here and mindfully create environments that are driven on praise and discussion, where pupils can say when things are building up and they need more time for an assignment and where they aren't stressed or scared to come into the classroom.

At times I struggled with feeling like the person of authority, that I had a right and responsibility to tell a pupil when their behaviour wasn't acceptable or productive. Because discipline wasn't a major concern in this school I see now that I let my guard now in terms of shutting down bad behaviour or disrespect early on. I was so often enjoying the atmosphere in a classroom that I subsequently wouldn't then enforce the rules or follow through on warnings in fear of ruining the good environment. Going forward I want to really focus on this, on setting ground rules for behaviour and following through with procedures set in place. I too often let pupils away with things that now I see would have been better dealt with sooner.

Working in St. Vincent's was definitely a defining period in my life. I experienced being part of a community of people learning and sharing. The sense of collaboration and positivity throughout the staff was nothing short of inspirational – the support, the work ethic, fixing problems rather than fixating on them. After observing and working alongside two host teachers of such amazing personal and professional qualities I feel that this is something I

can and want to do. I didn't know how much I could enjoy teaching, how rewarding sharing what you know with others can be while also consistently learning things in return

- There are very few professions where you get to challenge others and challenge yourself in an environment that is built around learning, creativity and support.