

A teacher | an  
educational  
experience



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Many times, when we are young, we are faced with decisions that we can only understand as we grow older. I can still remember that game, where my parents chose different things each representing a different job, and I had to pick one of them. This was supposed to indicate the road I was going to take as an adult and the work I was going to deal with.

The one thing I chose that time was a stethoscope, which meant I was going to study to become a doctor. As I grew older, many things changed and even my ideas became different from time to time. Now I find myself reading a four year course in teaching, and I would definitely have never imagined myself as a teacher.

## **Discussion**

Our professional life is something, which I think, cannot be decided when we are still young and without any experience. It is often affected by factors which are out of our control, and shaped by different experiences we go through in our life.

Way back through my secondary years, I used to imagine myself as a pilot or becoming an air-hostess, following my father's footsteps. I always loved planes and I remember telling my friends that once I finish school, I was going to work on a plane and start flying often. It all changed when I had to chose the subjects I wanted to broaden my studies on. We had a good variety of choices, amongst which sciences, maths, languages, and an option including physical education and home economics. This option was new to the school and it was introduced to the students of our year, so we were the first to experiment in this.

I was quite undecided on what to choose as sciences and maths were not my favourite, and I was left with languages and the other option of physical education. Obviously I sought my parents' advice, and they were not quite keen on me choosing physical education, so they encouraged me to take the option regarding languages. Despite this, I opted in choosing physical education.

At the beginning of the scholastic year, when I was in Form 2, the school employed a new physical education teacher, who was very young, fresh and enthusiastic on teaching new students. My life at school was very sedentary and I rarely used to attend to physical education lessons, because the teacher we had was very traditional. She used to give us a ball and let us experiment on our own each and every lesson. Otherwise, she also used to prepare lessons with about four (4) or five (5) different exercises and we had to spend the whole lesson practising the given skills.

This new teacher was different, I remember the very first lesson where I told her I was not going to take part because I did not want to, and she insisted on me helping her out throughout the lesson. The lesson was an introduction to football, something which I previously had never done. She literally caught my attention, as without even realising, I was taking part in the lesson with the whole class. It was so interesting and challenging, using games in order to make us think and experience the skill, rather than just giving it out. This teacher believed a lot in learning through experience, in order to help the students think and arrive to a conclusion. From that day onwards, my view on the physical education lessons totally changed, and there was not one lesson I did not fully participate in.

As Dewey (1897) claims “ I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.”

Agreeing to what Dewey states, learning and education are social and interactive processes, where the school is the institution which helps the child interact with the curriculum and learn through real, guided experiences. He compares two (2) extremes, that are the traditional method against the progressive method of teaching. The first one (traditional) is more of an authoritarian and strict approach, where the teacher focuses on delivering the curriculum, with not enough understanding of the students' experiences. The second method (progressive) is free, student-directed and uses the students' experiences to enable them to learn.

Going back to my primary years, I remember how I used to hate physical education because the teacher was very traditional and used to give us a ball and kind of dictate the skills that had to be practised, in order to stick to the syllabus content. This used to get annoying, with very minimal learning, and for this reason I always used to opt out in taking part and stay wandering around. This was only until the school employed the new teacher, and with her the lessons were so different. They were fun, progressive, and educational at the same time, introducing a variety of sports to us and teaching us numerous skills and games which we had never done in years.

Recalling these years made me understand how I wanted to become that teacher who makes the students love the subject and guide them to learn through their own experience, being able to understand the skills. I did not want to become the traditional teacher, as Dewey claims, who gives a ball to

the students and it's like sending a clear message I do not care in doing the lesson.

“ The teacher is not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits in the child, but is there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect the child and to assist him in properly responding to these influences.” (Dewey, 1987).

In physical education, students tend to ask for playing games rather than having a lesson focused on drills and skill practise. A very good method I have been introduced to at University is the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU), and our lecturers emphasize its use in schools. Throughout my teaching practice I realised it is very effective and endorses students in a thinking process, because rather than focusing on how to do it (main importance is given to the techniques practised), it addresses the why and the what if (students have to think of skills and strategies for better play). As Griffin and colleagues (1997) suggest, it helps in encouraging the students to respond with a range of creative actions, being able to critically think and make their own decisions. Students are thus able to develop a deeper meaning and understanding of what they are being taught, and be able to decide and use information in a variety of situations. Concurring to Dewey:

“...the true centre of correlation of the school subjects is not science, nor literature, nor history, nor geography, but the child's own social activities.” (Dewey, 1987).

Applying this method in my teaching practice, turned out very well and also made me realise that teaching is a drawing forth rather than a telling.

Teaching does not have to be a dictatorship, or else giving only importance to what lies within the curriculum. If students prefer learning through games, than use games to deliver the content, but in a way that encourages students to learn and not push them away in disliking the subject.

For example, taking physical education again and focusing the lesson on basketball; if the aim of the lesson is introduce passing, I would start the lesson by a ball possession game, where the students have to make five (5) consecutive passes to be able to score a point. In this manner, students are playing a game, practising passing between each other, and also being able to think and understand that in order to score a point they need to move about and create open spaces. Obviously, in contrast to the “ I want you to stay in pairs and pass the ball to each other” traditional method, this progressive approach allows the students to think and experience the skills.

As a future educator, I also believe that students need to be guided in order to be able to discover new knowledge. Socrates established a very important notion of philosophy, that is arriving at truth through a series of questions.

He used to question man in the street himself to arrive at political and ethical truths. He also questioned his students, as a means of instruction to engage them in thinking a problem and arriving at a critical conclusion.

Nowadays, this so called ‘ Socratic Method’, is very much used by teachers to stimulate learning in students. It focuses on the students’ knowledge to address a given problem, and learning is through a process of critical

thinking and discovery, and not by having the teacher telling the student the proper answer.

It is through the use of questioning methods, that students are encouraged to think and analyse a given situation. In teaching this is what is known to be as the 'guided-discovery' method, where the process is triggered off by a series of stimuli. These can range from small statements to questions that elicit discovery. The questions might then proceed in small steps, until the student discovers the wanted target or concept through own knowledge and experience.

An example drawn from a particular lesson I had during my teaching practice last year, where a student was finding it difficult to hit the ball, as the lesson was about softball (very similar to the baseball game). Instead of just telling her she had to swing the bat earlier, I started to ask her a series of questions to make her think about what she was doing wrong. The first question I asked her why wasn't she able to hit the ball, and her answer was that she was swinging earlier than the ball. To this I then invited her to think why she was swinging early, and she came to a conclusion that it was happening because she was not timing the ball correctly. Thus, automatically she realised that she needed to wait a bit more before swinging the bat. After a couple of times practising the swing, she managed to hit the ball. I could have easily told her to wait for the ball before swinging, but in this manner the student managed to arrive to the conclusion through her own experience and by critically thinking and analysing the problem.

Conclusion

In a learning community, learners construct their own knowledge, and then share it with the whole society through:

“...collaboration as an act of shared creation/and or shared discovery.”

(Schrage, 1990).

This is important, as in a world where technology is prevailing:

“...it is not possible for the individual to understand the complexities of this modern age without drawing on and accepting the contribution of others.”

(Schrage, 1990).

A teacher is definitely essential in helping the learner construct his or her own knowledge. Undoubtedly, a teacher also has great responsibility in preparing the students well for their careers and lives, and it is important to note that without the teacher, jobs such as those of a doctor, lawyer, auditor and so on, could not be taken as one needs to be taught before taking up a career.

Many people have been helpful and important in helping me become what I am today, but a person which has been an important role-model and inspired me to take this road, is my secondary physical education teacher. She is what I define a successful and efficient teacher, and one day I would like to be defined in that manner by my students.