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Module Title: Teacher as Professional Practitioner

Module Code: EN6084

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Essay Title: Teacher as Caring and Moral Person

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Declaration:

I declare that this report:

- contains references to at least 5 different books or articles
- uses the UL version of the Harvard Referencing system
- has a reference list at the end presented in alphabetical order by author
- is entirely my own work and does not include unreferenced material written by someone else

Date: Friday 12th April 2019

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the evidence and work of my success in achieving the following learning outcome as set out by the Teaching Council of Ireland -

1. Knowledge-Breath & Knowledge-Kind
    a) Ethical Standards & Professional Behaviour
    the unique role of the teacher as professional in providing for the holistic development of students.

The associated artefact (evidence) is included within the entry. Learning log entries are also used to support my entry and are listed as appendices at the end of the document.

Prior to the commencement of this Professional Masters in Education (PME), my initial interpretation of the roles and responsibilities of a music teacher focused on specific subject requirements, (i.e. musical knowledge, aural awareness and performance ability) academic demands and the learning needs of students. I believed this to be a comprehensive view of a teaching career. At this time, my understanding was largely influenced by my own educational experience and previous employment. Having completed my Leaving Certificate in 2006, I moved to Cork to attend the University College of Cork and later graduated with a bachelor's degree in music in 2010. In November 2012, I began working with Music Generation Cork City, a music programme that provides children with access to music education regardless of locality or background. Employed as a brass tutor, I worked with a team of musicians delivering instrumental and ensemble tuition to a number of primary and secondary school students in the Ballyphehane area of Cork city. Immersed in this work, I had the opportunity to indulge myself in practice while also sharing my love of music and performance with younger, aspiring musicians, it was the most challenging and rewarding task I had undertaken. Intrigued by teaching and feeling there was more to be discovered I made the decision to return to education. (Appendix 3; *Learning Log Entry 1*)

Continued engagement throughout this programme has challenged the comprehensive view of education I had envisioned. There was an unimaginable depth and complexity to teaching; it was more than I had ever experienced as a secondary school student and more than I had understood as a music tutor. I wasn't here to become 'a teacher'; I was here to become a

'teaching professional'. Understanding this role in its entirety has been difficult, as *"what it means to be professional, to show professionalism or to pursue professionalization is not universally agreed or understood"*. (Hargreaves, Ivor, 1996, p.3) I was trying to reveal a sense of self within a professional capacity, yet with the interpretation of *"professional knowledge and professional action in teaching"* (Hargreaves, Ivor, 1996, p.3) vast and varied; how was I move forward? Exploring my metaphor for teaching also highlighted some personal confusion as I struggled to visualise teaching professionally. What did this look like? (Appendix 4; *Learning Log Entry 2*) What did I look like with it? And yet, having gravitated towards a quietly supportive role, '*to inspire hope and potential'*, I queried if such a solution presented '*too much of me*?' (Appendix 5; *Learning Log Entry 2*).

As a pre-service teacher, this internal struggle is not unique for *"learning to become a teacher is a complex, multi-dimension and subjective process of identity construction."* (cit. In EN6084 Teacher as a Professional Practitioner') Revealing this identity is not without difficulties. As I previously mentioned, on entering this PME programme I was shouldered with a 'ready-made' identity, an identity reflective of and influenced by my own educational experience. This identity was quickly disputed. Engagement with lecture content, literature and school placement experiences created an internal sense of interrogation. Questioning all I had previously valued, the construction of my identity became an *"unsettling, conflictive and always incomplete"* process. (Bullough 1997; Britzman 2003; Caires, Almeida, and Martins 2010; Flores and Day 2006; Hinchion 2107, cit. In EN6084 Teacher as a Professional Practitioner') Although having trusted the initial portrayal of my teacher identity, I was determined to uncover what lay beneath. Brookfield, in *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher,* speaks to the necessity of 'hunting assumptions' to avoid 'teaching innocently'. Teaching innocently, is when we as teachers, assume *"the meanings and significance we place in our actions are the ones that students take from them*" (Brookfield, 1995, p.7) My pre-conceived sense of self around teaching and learning was irrelevant when faced with this reality for *"the sincerity of intentions does not guarantee the purity of practice"*. (Brookfield, 1995, p.7) Dismayed and a little defeated, I continued to move forward. In doing so, engagement with critical reflection to support progression was crucial, as *"becoming alert to the oppressive dimensions to our practice is often the first step in working more democratically and cooperatively with students and colleagues."* (Brookfield, 1995, p.11) Commitment to the pursuit of exploring a more analytic and objective sense of self within a

professional capacity has challenged me to push personal boundaries, to move beyond the comfort and security of safe and familiar. Slowly, feelings of uncertainty began to disperse and with calm, focused attention, my identify as a professional practitioner began to evolve.

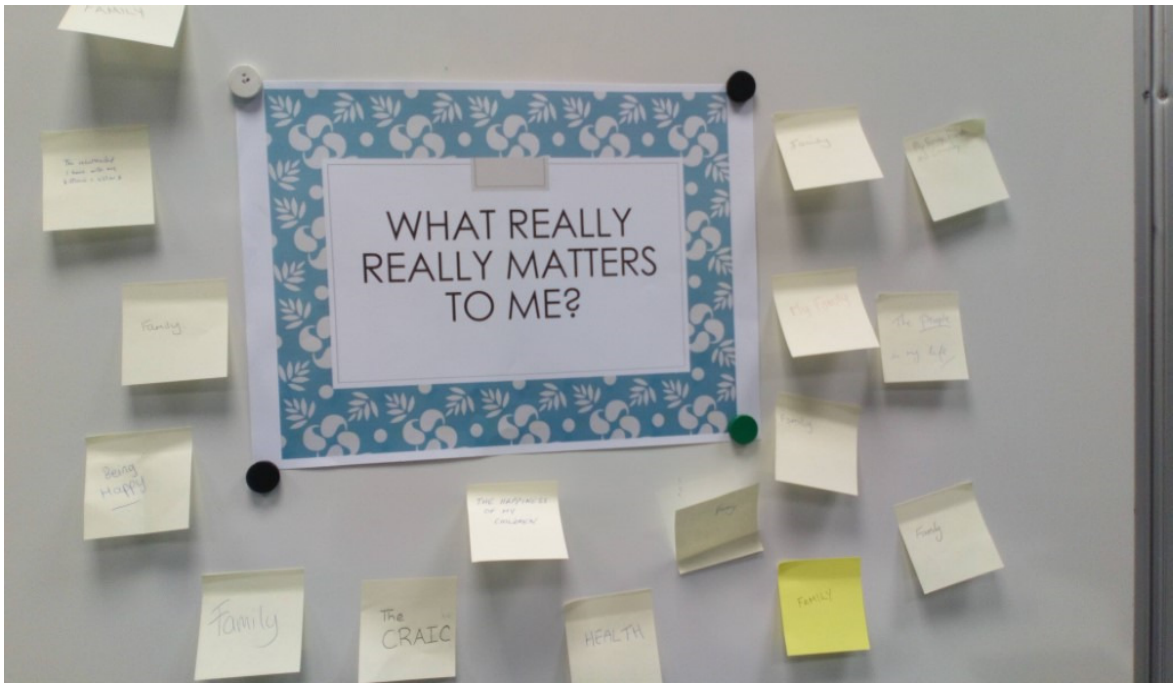
Development

Evidence

Photographs of a 'Living Values' activity completed during a tutorial led by Dr. Patricia Kieran as part of module EN6084 'Teacher as a Professional Practitioner' under the instruction of Dr. Joanne O' Flaherty. See *Appendices 1 and 2* below.

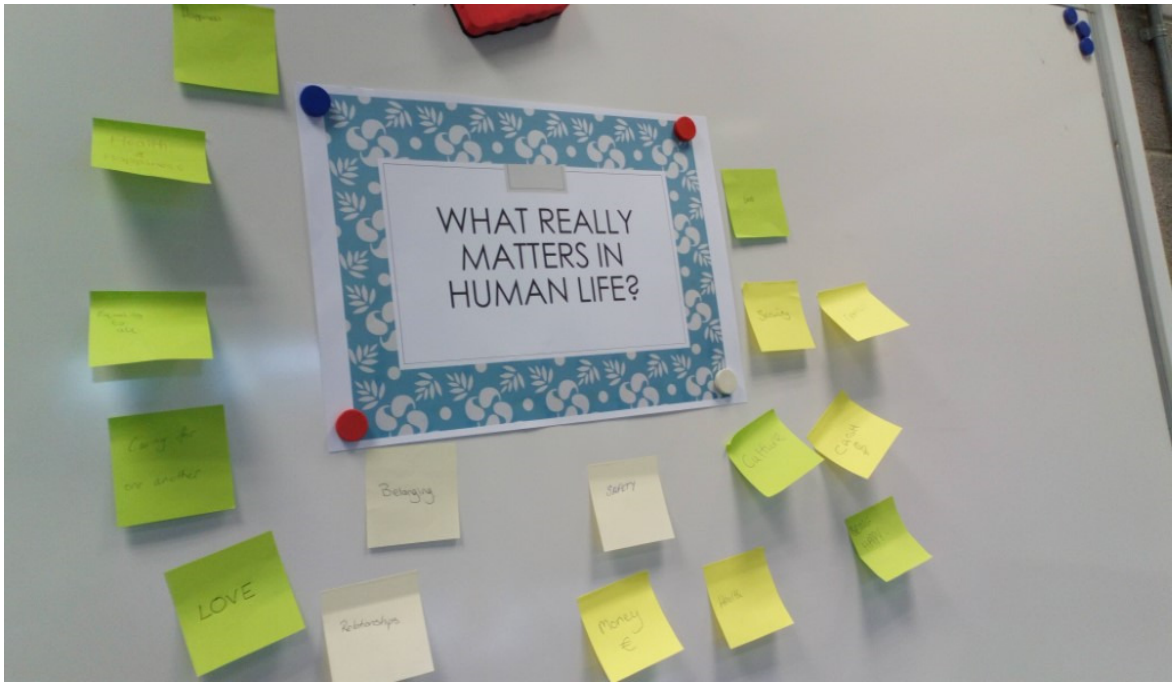
Appendix 1; *'Living Values'*

Tutorial



Appendix 2; *'Living Values'*

Tutorial



Description of Performance Evidence

Completed with my peers, *Appendix 1 and 2* display the results of a tutorial activity, entitled 'Living Values'. Directed by Dr. Patricia Kieran, we worked together in small groups, participating in a variety of games to unearth and discuss personal beliefs and values. Contribution to this activity required each student to carefully consider Q1 '*What really, really matters to me?*' and Q2 '*What really matters in human life?'* Completed independently from the group, we were invited to personally and privately respond to each question. Responses were written on post-it notes and added to the corresponding whiteboards. Time was allocated to view the accumulated beliefs and values of our peers. Responses to question one included – *'family', 'the relationship I have with my brothers and sisters', 'being happy', 'health', 'the people in my life', the happiness of my children'* and *'the craic'*. Responses to question two included – *'happiness', 'health', 'equality', 'caring for one another', 'love', 'relationships', 'belonging', 'safety', 'money', 'happiness', 'culture'* and *'security'*.

Having completed a total of four activities, we later were encouraged to share how we felt during the process. I had found it to be an amazing experience. (Appendix 6; *Learning Log Entry 12)* I was surprised by how many of my peers spoke negatively regarding their

experience - it had been uncomfortable, awkward and irrelevant to their subject discipline. Some expressed the opinion that the content would be of little interest to secondary school students, while others queried how were we to effectively implement the activities while maintaining classroom management. For me personally, engaging and contributing to the workshop activities was a powerful and emotive experience. Yes, it was at times uncomfortable, I also struggled, but why are we prepositioned to view uncomfortable experiences as bad experiences? (Appendix 6; *Learning Log Entry 12)* If we, as pre-service teachers, avoid uncomfortable yet challenging experiences, how prepared are we to challenge our own students without having challenged ourselves first? (Appendix 7; *Learning Log Entry 12*) While the response from my peers may have been unexpected, I remained intrigued by the unexpected strength and power of my own.

Relationship of Evidence to Standards and Competencies

One of the knowledge learning outcomes is **'Ethical Standards and Professional Behaviour'.** Within this outcome is the expectation that the teacher will have knowledge and understanding of:

- *the unique role of the teacher as professional in providing for the holistic development of students.*

With the recent implementation of the Junior Cycle, the expectations and demands of teachers in supporting the holistic development of students is extensive due to the explicit inclusion of well-being throughout the programme. (O'Flaherty & McCormack, 2019, p.5) Having participated in the workshop and considering my reaction, it quickly became evident to me, that my response had inadvertently revealed a desire to fulfil this role, to support the holistic development of students. While its value and importance has been repeatably articulated within the education system, there remains concern surrounding the employment of holistic development as the interpretation of *"whole child development or holistic development"* varies but *"reflects the discourse of moral, social and emotional development"* (Tam, 2002) As a pre-service teacher, this difficulty also resonated with me as I had struggled to visualize what the inclusion of holistic development may look like within a classroom environment. However, this tutorial, led by Dr. Patricia Kieran, rectified my concern. The provision of a space and time to share our beliefs and values subsequently highlighted a variety of commonalities and connections amongst our class. As we circulated to read the post-it notes, we were provided with a brief but powerful

insight into the lives of our peers. I found this to be a particularly emotive experience. Immersed in our final semester, the college environment had become more stressful, intense and competitive, yet this activity quietly and calmly reminded us of what we valued most in life, subsequently nurturing our moral, social and emotional development.

Reflection on Relationship of Evidence to Effective Practice

Although having attended this tutorial several weeks ago, the impact and effect it has had, personally and professionally, continues to resonate with me. As a secondary school student, the *"drive for academic adequacy"* (Noddings, 1995 p. 94) led all educational experiences as I focused on retaining and regurgitating information. However, '*The White Paper for Education'* published in 1995 expresses an educational aim, focused *"on nurturing the holistic development of the individual".* (DES, 1995, p.5) Yet, having completed my Leaving Certificate in 2006 I never encountered expressions of interest surrounding the holistic development of students within an academic capacity.

O' Flaherty et al. (2019) suggest the resistance regarding the consideration and inclusion of holistic development within classroom practice may be impacted by "*the dominance of classical humanist and modernist vocational ideologies within second-level schooling in Ireland".* Perhaps some of my peers hold a similar educational ideology, subsequently restricting them to willingly embrace this educational challenge. Returning once more, to the discourse surrounding teacher professionalism, the role of the teacher within 21st century Ireland is also recognised as one of *"motivator, psychologist, mentor, mediator, leader, administrator, manager … teacher"* (cit. in EN6084, 'Teacher as Professional Practitioner') Yet with the teaching profession *"characterized by high degrees of complexity*" (Hargreaves, Goodson 1996, p. 14) are we demanding too much of our teaching professionals? Is it at all possible? Personally, viewing the profession in this light is incredibly overwhelming. Perhaps the answer is to simply ask *"What do we want for our children?"*(Nodding, 1995, p.95). With*"the traditional organization of schooling intellectually and morally inadequate for contemporary society"* (Nodding, 1995, p.99) why do we as teaching professionals continue to succumb to these academic constraints? In continuing to avoid embracing the opportunity to support the holistic development of our students within the classroom, we continue to feed failure. This is also poetically expressed and reinforced by a parent contributing to an article entitled "*Plastic people in pinstripe suits: an exploration of the views of Irish parents on the publication of school league tables"* (McCormack et al, 2015, p.523) whereby the education

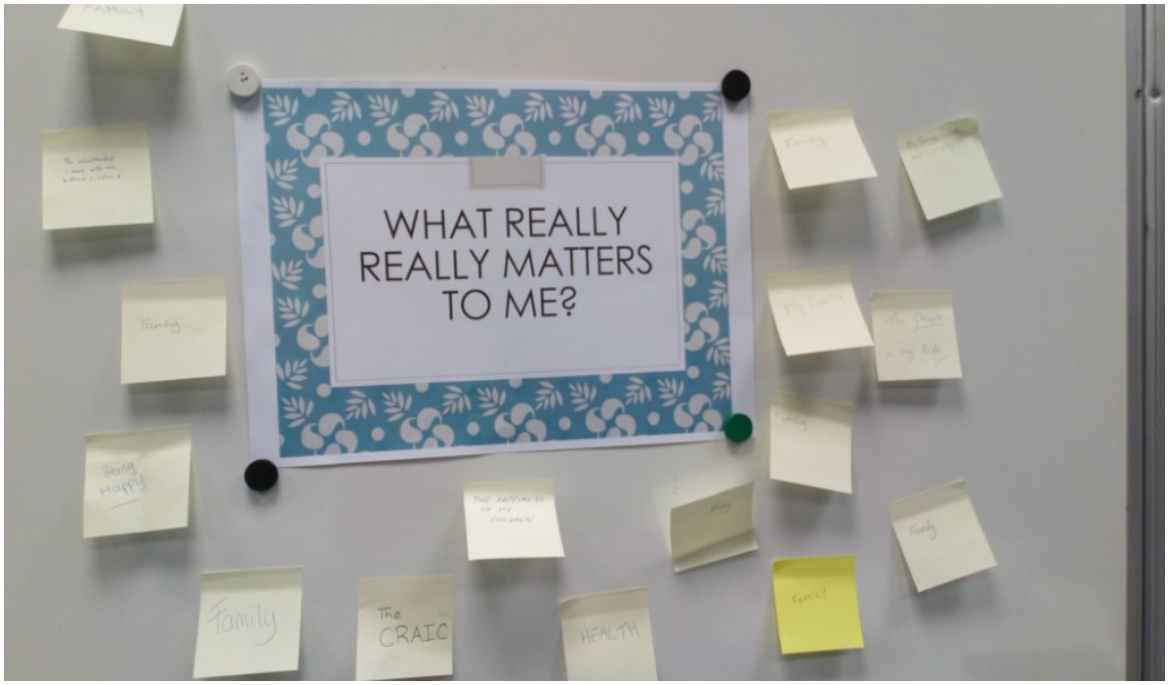
of our young people should be "*to teach them love, kindness and tolerance and not to be gearing them to reach 600[points], to look like plastic people in pinstripes suits with no souls".*

Concluding thoughts

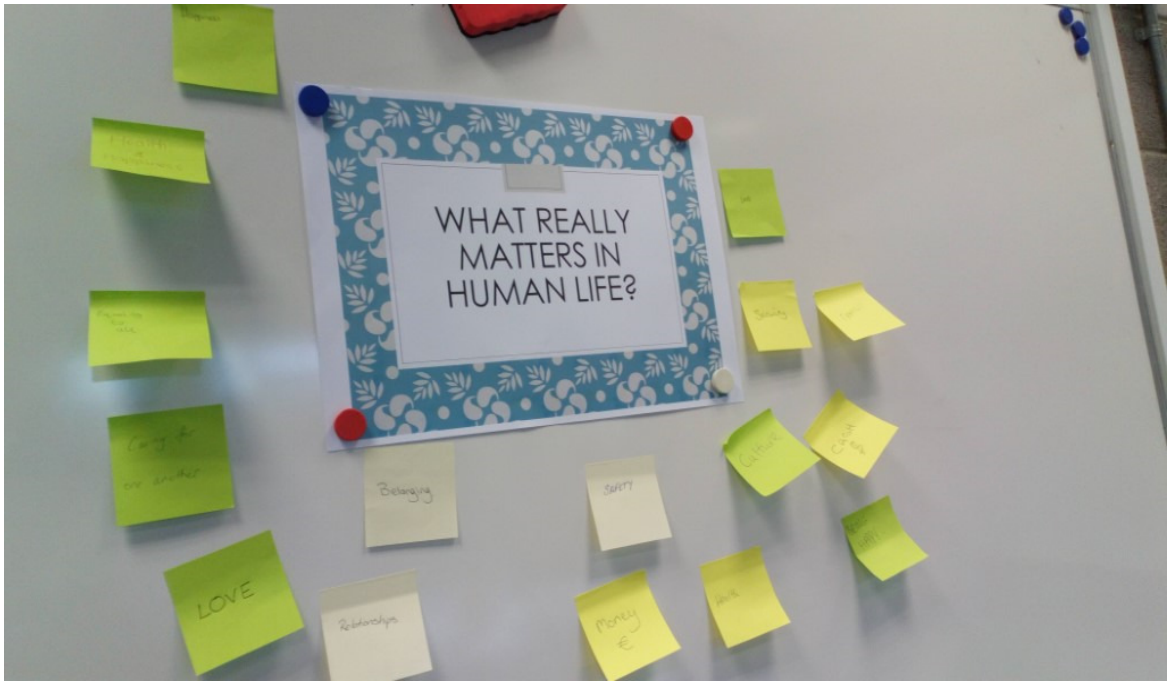
This paper has provided me with the opportunity to chart my progress from student to professional practitioner. My understanding of the profession and my place within it has evolved. This growth or *'emotional labour' (*Kyriacou 2001*)* has been surprising, frustrating, at times upsetting but predominantly exciting. In the weeks to come, I will complete this programme, and while its completion signifies the end of one journey it is the beginning of many more to come.

Appendices

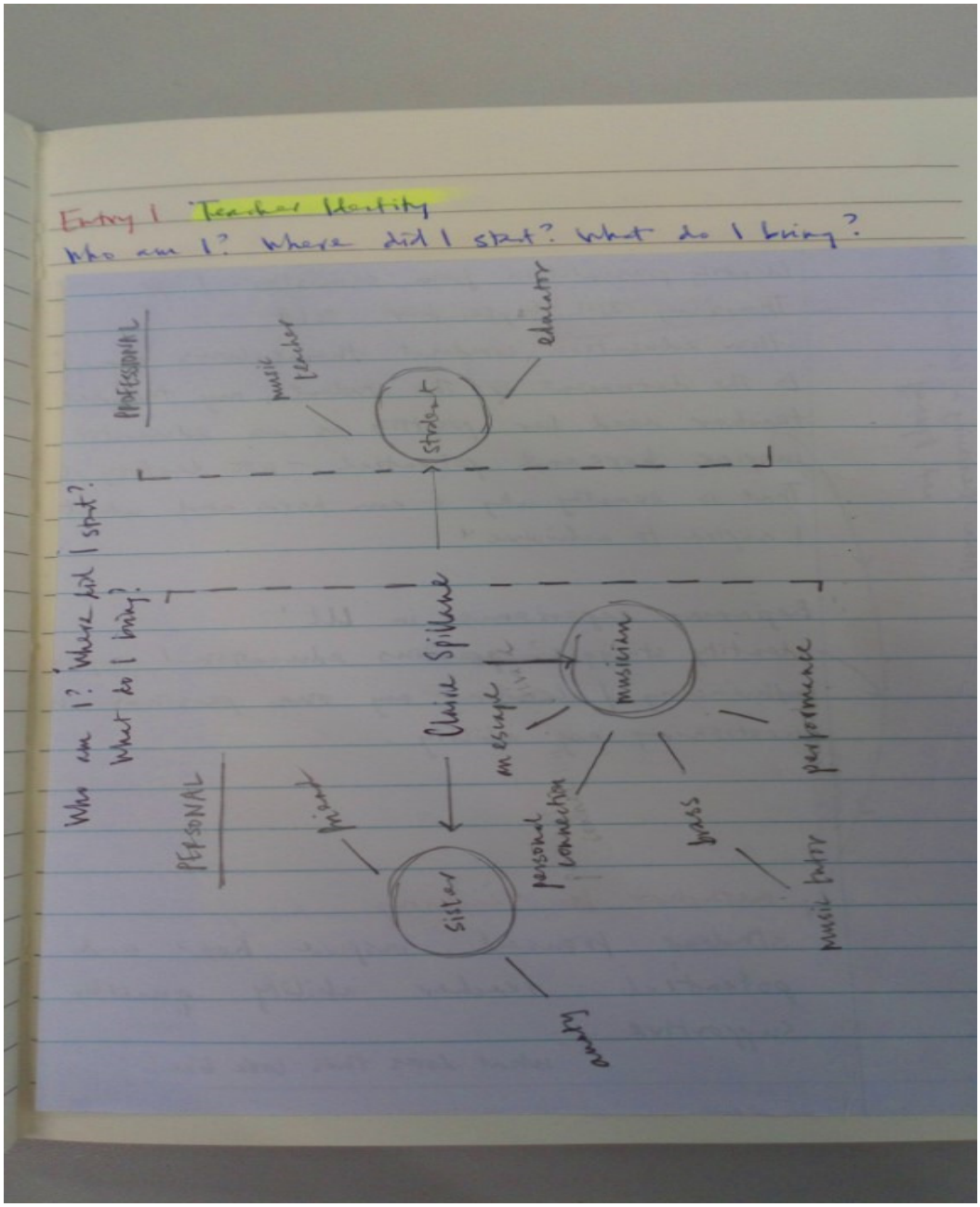
Appendix 1; *Living Values' Tutorial*



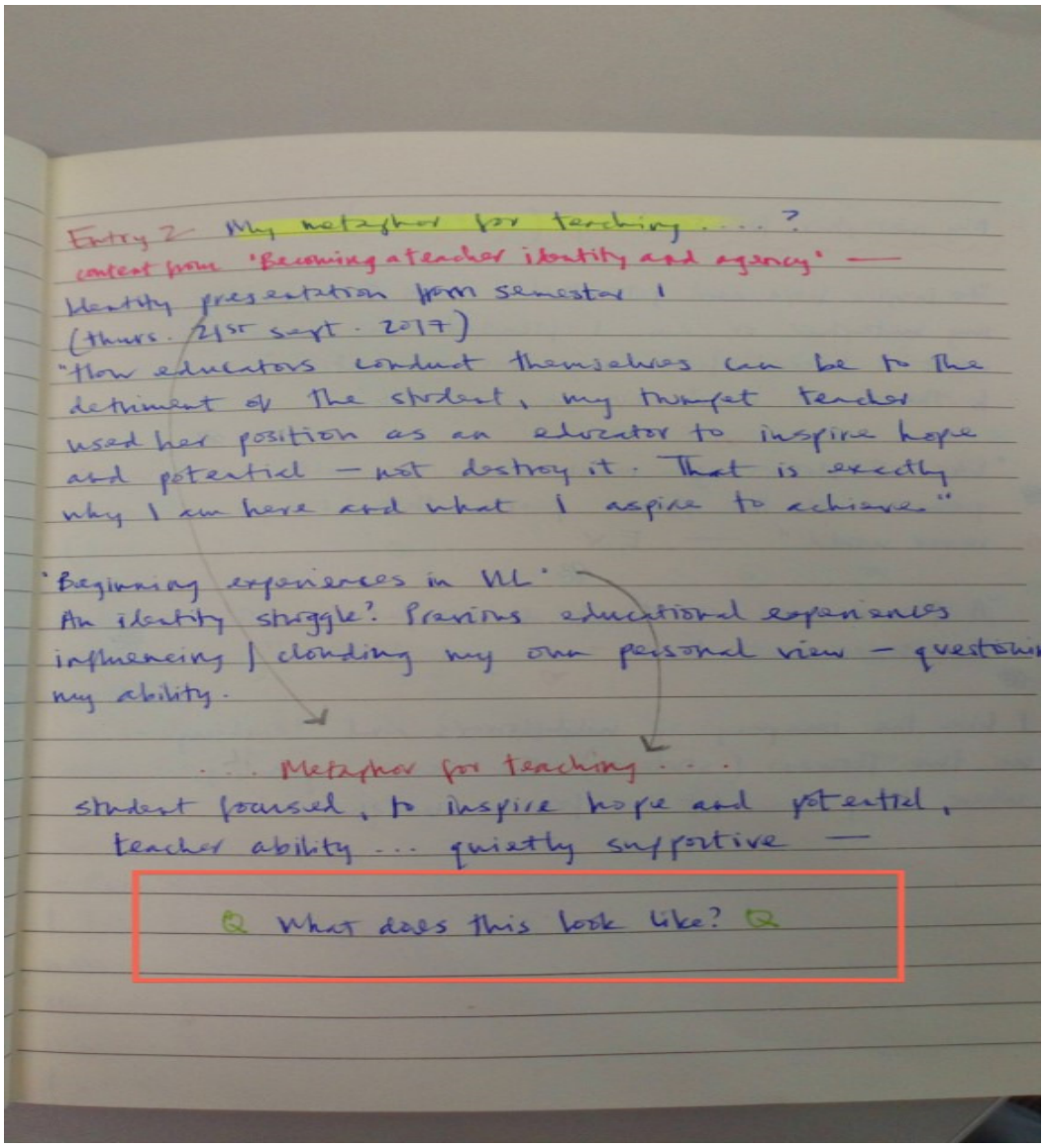
Appendix 2; *'Living Values' Tutorial*



Appendix 3; *Learning Log Entry 1*



Appendix 4; *Learning Log Entry 2*



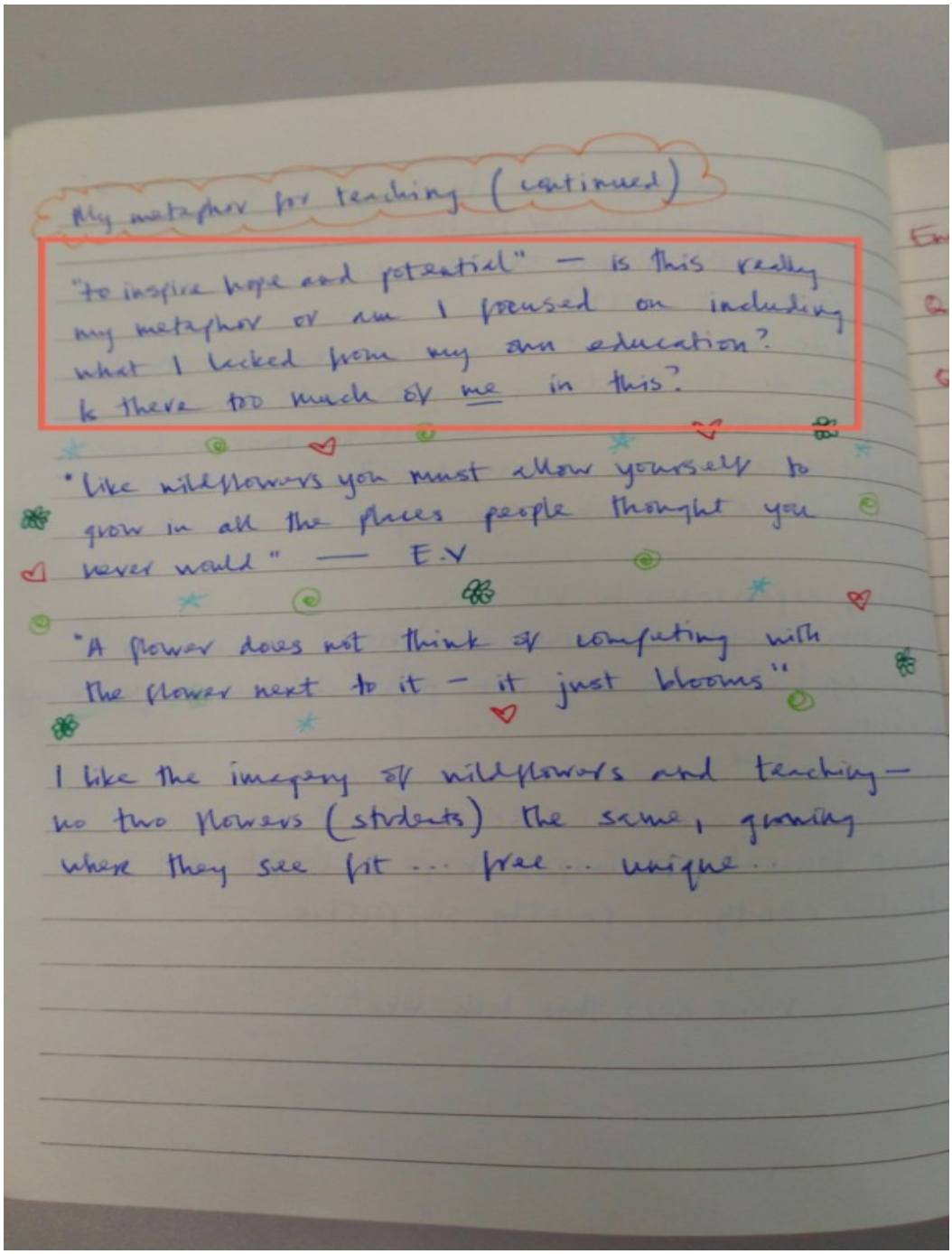
Entry 2 – My metaphor for teaching . . . ?
context from 'Becoming a teacher identity and agency' —
Identity presentation from semester 1
(thurs. 21st sept. 2017)
"How educators conduct themselves can be to the detriment of the student, my trumpet teacher used her position as an educator to inspire hope and potential – not destroy it. That is exactly why I am here and what I aspire to achieve."

'Beginning experiences in HL'
An identity struggle? Previous educational experiences influencing / clouding my own personal view – questioning my ability.

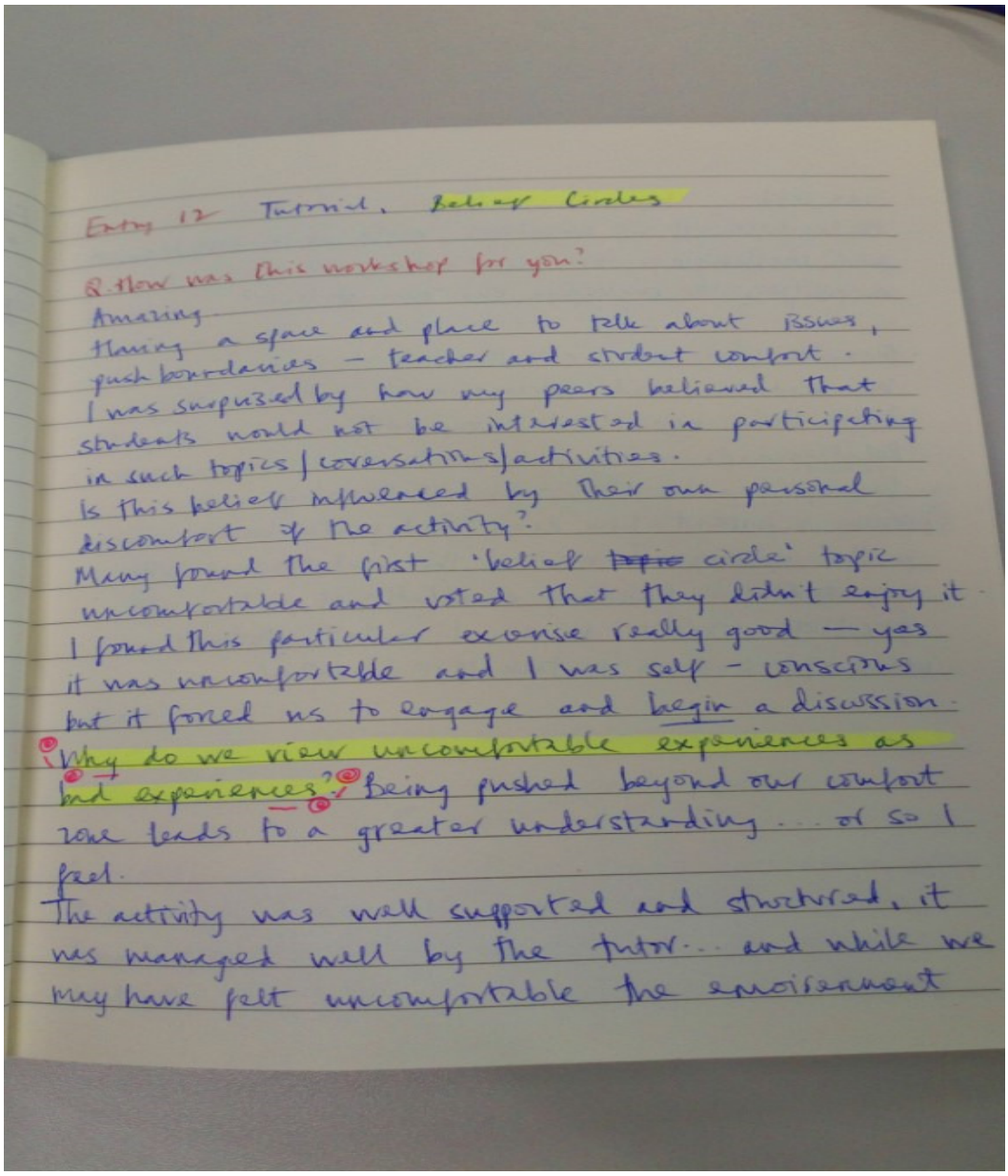
. . . Metaphor for teaching . . .
student focused, to inspire hope and potential,
teacher ability . . . quietly supportive —

Q What does this look like? Q

Appendix 5; *Learning Log Entry 2*



Appendix 6; *Learning Log Entry 12*



Entry 12 Turmoil, Belief Circles

Q. How was this workshop for you?

Amazing

Having a space and place to talk about issues, push boundaries - teacher and student comfort.

I was surprised by how my peers believed that students would not be interested in participating in such topics / conversations / activities.

Is this belief influenced by their own personal discomfort of the activity?

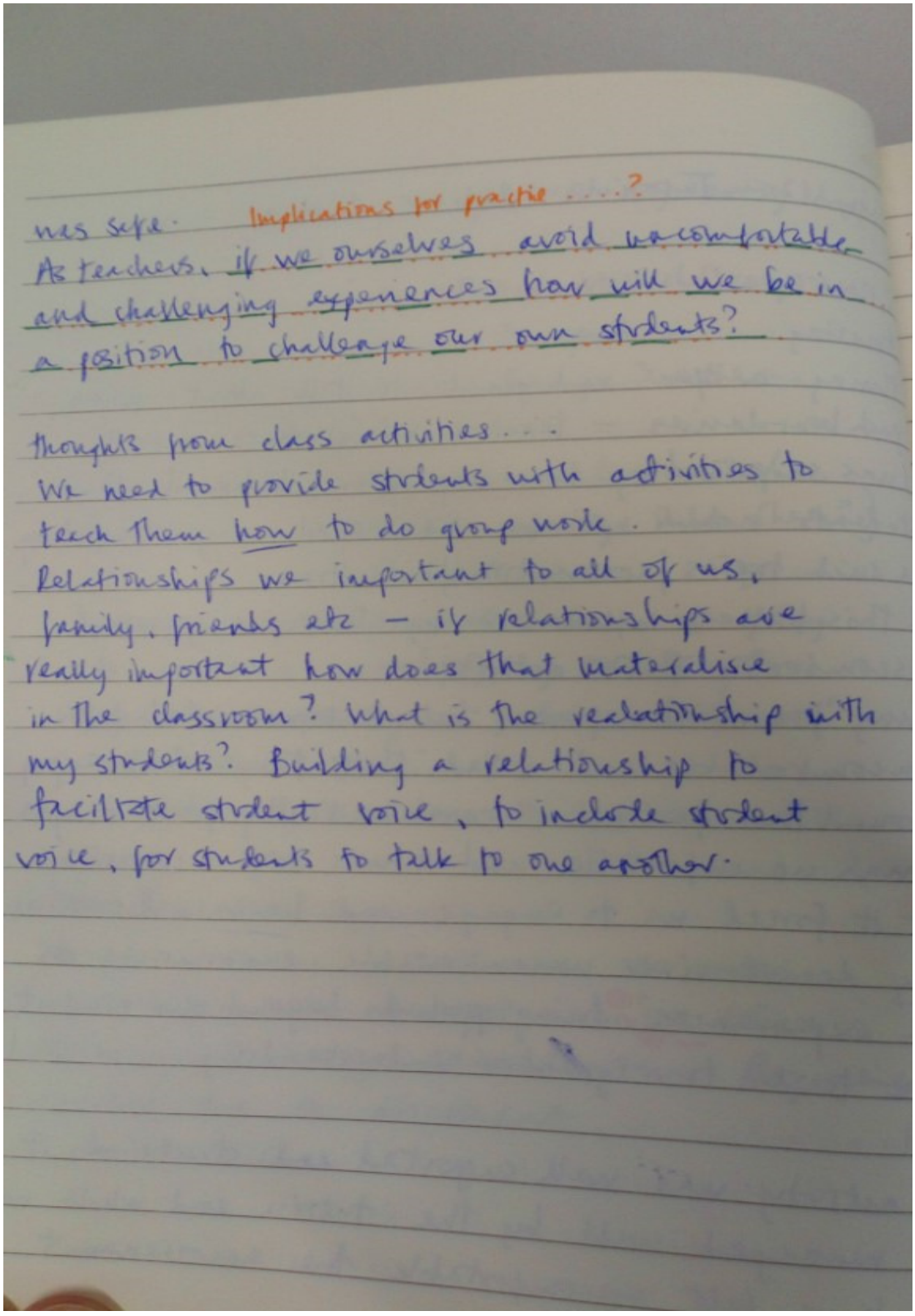
Many found the first 'belief ~~topic~~ circle' topic uncomfortable and voted that they didn't enjoy it.

I found this particular exercise really good - yes it was uncomfortable and I was self-conscious but it forced us to engage and begin a discussion.

Why do we view uncomfortable experiences as bad experiences? Being pushed beyond our comfort zone leads to a greater understanding... or so I feel.

The activity was well supported and structured, it was managed well by the tutor... and while we may have felt uncomfortable the environment

Appendix 7; Learning Log Entry 12



was safe. Implications for practice ....?
As teachers, if we ourselves avoid uncomfortable and challenging experiences how will we be in a position to challenge our own students?

thoughts from class activities...
We need to provide students with activities to teach them how to do group work.
Relationships are important to all of us, family, friends etc - if relationships are really important how does that materialise in the classroom? What is the realationship with my students? Building a relationship to facilitate student voice, to include student voice, for students to talk to one another.

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