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### **BBED6811 Post-reflective essay**

Those days in Vietnam are neither too far nor too near from now. Honestly, my memories have been gradually fading. To speak about them now, it would be like painstakingly removing a small stone stuck between the gears. However, since that profound sense of awe remains deep inside me, once the stone is picked out, all the gears will begin to spin swiftly again. Therefore, for the past few hours, I have been sitting quietly in front of the laptop, slowly prying that stone away, piece by piece.

### **Critical incidents**

During my time at Maison Chance, I would reflect on some details of the day every night before falling asleep. And there was one incident that kept circling in my mind back then. In the SEN class, there were some big kids with autism who were interested in drawing. Initially, I tried to engage with them in a very enthusiastic and energetic manner, including chatting with them often, offering great praise, and using friendly physical touch. I thought my 'warmth' would melt their 'alienated' heart. But things did not follow my expectations. Although these kids remained polite, I could clearly sense a particular avoidance and distance towards me. This made me feel so confused: I was being so easygoing, but why did they still take a detour or avoid eye contact when they saw me? However, my friend Jenna had a good relationship with them naturally.

So, the other day, I tried to observe how Jenna interacted with the older kids. Instead of talking to them, most of the time she was just sitting and doodling with them. The main interactions between them were the exchange of drawings and simple physical contact, like shaking hands. With this observation, I searched online for better ways to get along with children with autism after the lesson. I realised that, for them, social interaction would actually bring a significant amount of pressure, which explained why they were not fond of eye contact or excessive conversation. In addition, their special way of expressing affection and closeness is through sharing or doing their interests together; in this case, drawing was the interest. As a result, Jenna's tranquil way of interacting made them feel more comfortable, while my approach only left them feeling unsettled and unsure. During the following days, I adjusted my actions and my relationship with the kids has improved.

Based on this incident, I needed to face the uncomfortable truth: despite my initial approach was rooted in a genuine desire to connect, it was fundamentally self-centered. I had assumed that my way of showing intimacy was a universal language of warmth, so I projected my own social needs to individuals who have their unique ways of being. Seriously saying, this is also a form of arrogance, an arrogance that comes from people who are considered as the 'normal' or 'mainstream'. On the other hand, I really appreciate Jenna. She has a sensitive heart that can always help her to take care of the needs of others. I think what I learnt from this experience is also applicable to service learning and even global education. We should not rigidly impose what we consider 'good' (e.g. the values, social modes, knowledge) onto others, especially towards those with different identities, backgrounds, and cultures from us. Indeed, in such situations, they may have sensed our good intentions, but this does not mean that we have respected them as individuals because we lack the most basic understanding and empathy since the beginning. Just like for my behavior, I have actually demanded the older children with autism to adapt to my social rules, instead of me seeking to understand their world.

### **The most significant learning**

The above analysis is just a small of my self-realization. In large, the biggest finding of myself during the experience is, I never knew I could set aside my face and reserve so completely to breathe life into a classroom. From my prior self-awareness, I was a person who was very afraid of embarrassment. To prevent the awkwardness, I would rather never step out to do what I want. But in the classroom of Maison Chance, I realized that teachers' emotions are directly tied to the atmosphere of the classroom, and they will even be amplified and reflected back to the teacher.

Take our failed lesson plan 'soundscape' as an example. We have prepared relatively comprehensive materials and learning objectives for this lesson. However, we had serious doubts about whether the students would find it interesting or not. Also, we agreed that it would be quite embarrassing to present the soundscape. With these emotions, our group showed an obvious negative attitude when we were teaching, such as giving a demonstration without confidence. In return, when we asked the students to present their own version of soundscape, they all fell into silence, which made the atmosphere even more frozen. This situation has forced our group to reflect on our behaviours afterwards, and we agreed that we should be an 'actor/actress' to present a more active and open character in our following lessons. Therefore, in other days, we tried to inhibit the feeling of embarrassment by doing exaggerated and funny gestures, or having a small drama in the explanation part.

**They make us feel  
connected to where we live.**



**Chúng khiến chúng ta cảm thấy  
gắn bó với nơi mình sống.**

**Sounds help us understand  
our environment.**



**Âm thanh giúp chúng ta hiểu về  
môi trường xung quanh.**

(The learning objective of soundscape is to use a multi-sensory method to feel cultures and environments.)

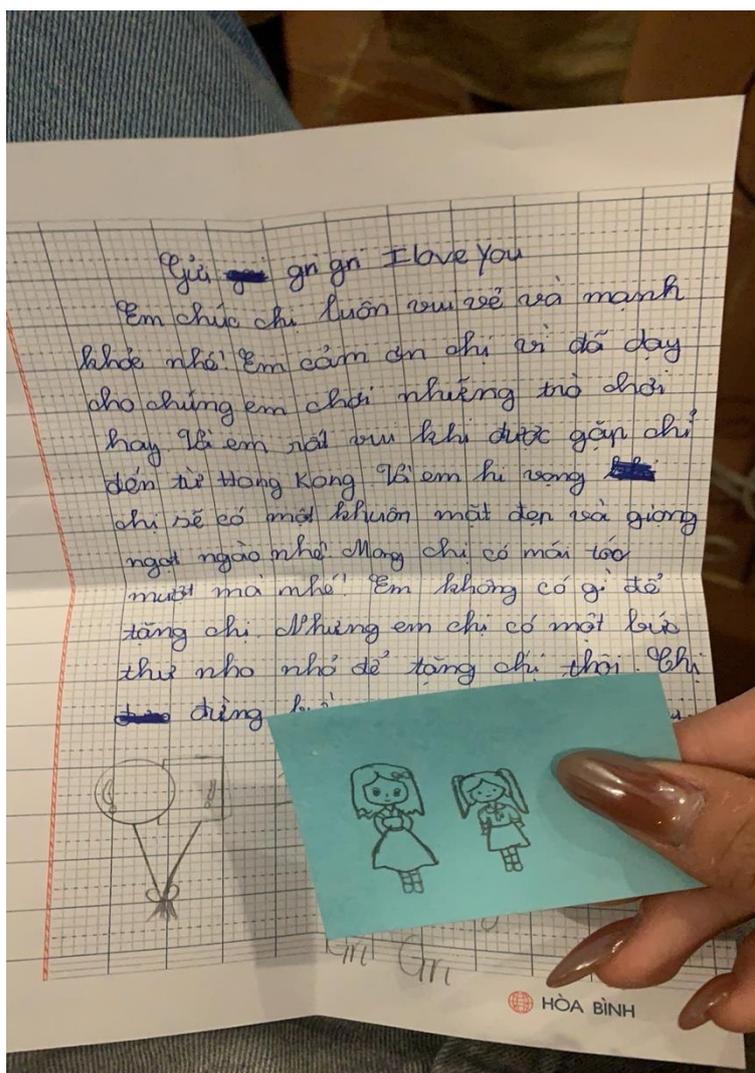
Through repeated practice, I gradually realised that it is not a big deal to put your face down to keep students engaged. Moreover, it is not even a big deal in our daily life. Embarrassment is just a temporary emotion, but if you give up opportunities and miss out on some precious moments because of this concern, the feeling of pity could be more overwhelming. Just like if I chose to keep the distance and preserve my image in the lesson, I would never get this close to the children, which I would feel regret for the rest of my life.

Another significant learning outcome is pretty common, which is to stay flexible. Our team would adjust the lesson plan based on students' daily feedback and our own reflections. This does not mean the original plan was flawed, but rather that we have successfully recognized a more suitable approach in the moment. This process has trained my problem-solving skills. It has also reinforced a key principle to me: effective teaching has no fixed definition; it is like water, changeable and flowing. Of course, there should be a framework, but it also allows both teachers and students the freedom to adapt and co-create. Ultimately, a more comfortable and productive environment can be fostered for teaching and learning.

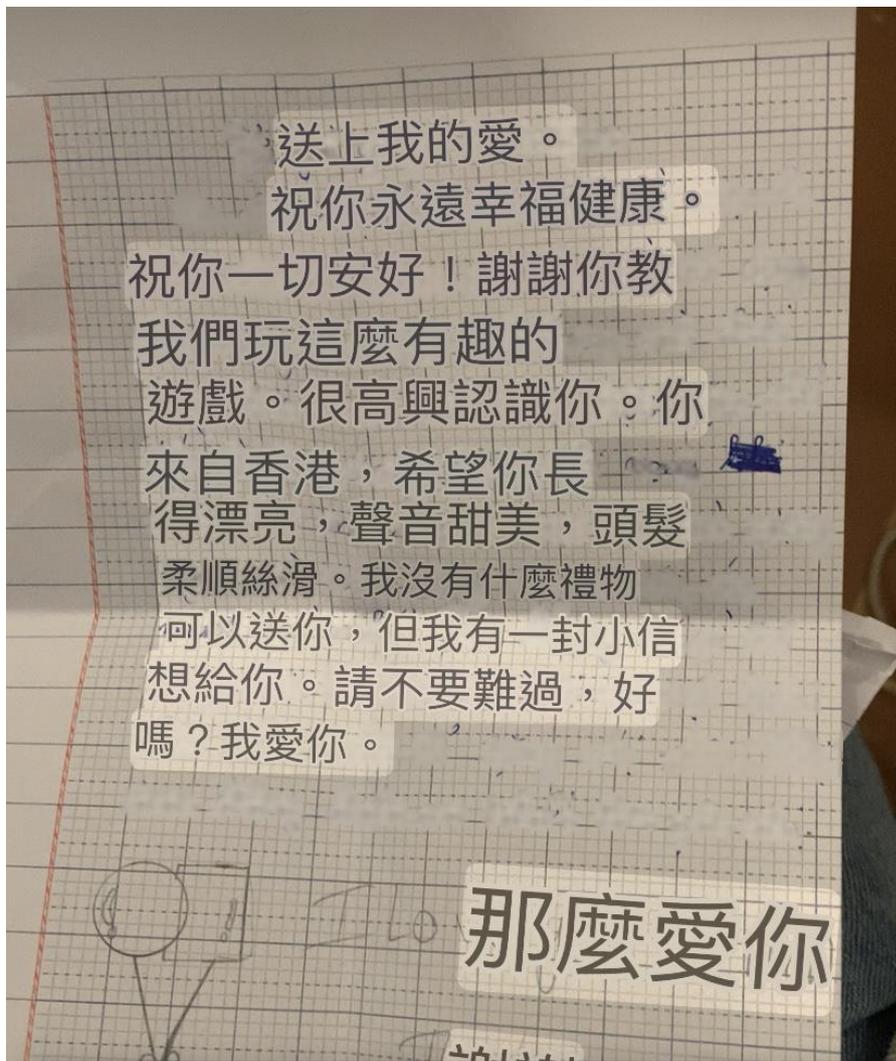
## 'Ah-ha' Moment

Frankly speaking, the whole journey has given me numerous shocks. But the biggest surprise is the fearlessness and naturalness the students expressed when showing their affection to us. In the first day of teaching, we barely knew the kids, but they were already giving us love letters and presents. When we were leaving, everyone was carrying a heavy bag of love. I could not understand this in the beginning. I remember when Jenna and I went back to our room with the love letters on the first day, what we felt was not pure happiness. Instead, we discussed and speculated on some bad possibilities—were they trying to please us? Did they want to be a teacher pet? Why could they send out love so easily?

But fortunately, the more we got to understand them, the more we could feel their sincerity. We had several deep talks regarding this topic. Throughout the growth of Jenna and me, there were so many bad experiences that have carved permanent wounds in our hearts. We were not successful in getting along with our classmates in the past. So, sometimes we could not control ourselves from assuming the bad intentions of others. Furthermore, we think the social environment is another influential factor. Comparing



with the students in Hong Kong, it seems like the kids in Maison Chance are simpler and more direct. Therefore, the past experience and environment have shaped our identities, and the identities affected how we perceive the situations around us. I know this is a bad habit, I do not want to be like this. However, it is something which is hard to be eradicated. Perhaps all I can do is to recall the beautiful encounter in Maison Chance and remind myself again and again.



(The love letter from a student)

## **Professional growth and Impacts on understanding of T&L**

Although I am an education student, I have always had a certain extent of resistance to becoming a teacher. My learning journey was a total torture; I have constantly wanted to escape from the education curriculum I was in and even my life. In this case, I could not accept that I would become an accomplice in this oppression. But after the experience in Maison Chance, I discovered that I actually did not hate teaching. In fact, I could feel the satisfaction when I saw those little heads buried in their work, heard their childish laughs, and played with them. Despite it being just a short experiential period of time, it ignites part of my passion for being a teacher. I may not be able to eradicate some mindsets and regulations that I dislike in the current education system, but at least in a small classroom, I can have little control over how I treat my students and the format of my teaching. I hope I can stay true to this passion and implement it in my future career.

Back to the aim of this course, which is intercultural education, I think we have achieved it through our lesson progression. In the first few classes, we carried out multicultural education, which was mainly about acknowledging the diversity around the world. After that, we tried to bring out some workshops that encouraged the students to manifest the mentioned ideologies into active engagement, communication, and exchange of ideas. Although what we taught was just the tip of the iceberg of intercultural education, we did introduce knowledge that focused on the correct relationships and interactions we should have with different groups to the students. Reflecting on my past education in traditional secondary school, exposure to related concepts was primarily theoretical. Although these ideas were introduced as multiculturalism, the reality was that we rarely had the opportunity to put them into meaningful practice so as to manifest interculturalism. Therefore, for my future plan, I would like to participate more in the workshops that discuss intercultural education, particularly in how to put it into action and make it sustainable.

Another thing I want to mention is the necessity of experiential learning. I remember one day when we were having lunch in Maison Chance, it was mentioned that some scholars oppose experiential learning. I was confused about the opposition, so I searched online for the reasons. The rejection of it typically stems from the significant resource and time constraints, superficial learning, and ethical issues, etc. But since I had some profound outcomes from this course, I do think learning should go beyond the classroom, draw up complex emotions and deep reflection. Maybe in my nature, lessons can only be woven into my being through joy and sorrow; knowledge can only be truly absorbed into me through tincturing with personal sentiments. I am sure that there must be others who share this way of being. In my future, I am interested in researching experiential learning, not just joining related courses, but also thinking about the ways to refine the curriculum so it can be a robust plan.

## **Conclusion**

The gears in my brain are spinning swiftly, it is a consuming process to gather all the glimpses of my mind. Sometimes I think about what I have brought to the children at Maison Chance. I had a presentation and wrote essays on this experience, so there can be some visible outcomes to fulfil the goal of 'gain'. But for the children, perhaps it was just a brief, relaxing break in their routine. Years from now, the details may blur, leaving the memory as just a small chapter in the story of their young lives. But then I also reflect on my thoughts, why do I always want to create remarkable meaning in anything? It is like an obsession that I must validate the existence of something with concrete evidence. At the end of the day, as long as there is one person on Earth remembers this wonderful bond and notices that someone will always hold love for these children, then all of it is truly real, and that is enough.