

ESSAY ON OBSERVATION BY MABELETTE BERMACK

1. What did you learn about teaching from the observation?

I learned that one can teach grammar and concepts like syntax without formally introducing the topic or even explaining that you are doing it. The game “Apples to Apples” was played at the end of class. The teacher pulled a word card and the learners were asked to make a sentence from that word and a word they pulled from a deck of cards dealt to each of them at the onset of the closing session. The teacher encourages them to make the sentences as developed as possible. Simple sentences with only subject, verb and object were not accepted. In formulating sentences under these circumstances, the students demonstrated and applied proper syntax. In completing the exercise, the students demonstrated the ability to order the words to form and communicate a complete sentence.

2. What have you learned from the observation that relates to your current TESOL class?

An earlier reading noted that one’s ability to learn a new language correlates with the learner’s fluency and education level in their native tongue. This was evident in the session I observed. The learners were from five different countries but were all educated professional people who were motivated to learn. They helped each other and the teacher keep the conversation going throughout the session.

The teacher refrained from over-correcting the learners, even ones with significant pronunciation issues. This gave them confidence to participate despite their difficulties with communication.

I think there could have been more emphasis or even a segment on correct pronunciation. Most of the learners had a fairly extensive vocabulary but were sometimes difficult to understand.

3. Discuss in detail the classroom management.

The teacher broke the session into segments. She introduced idioms related to the primary discussion point. That day it was banking. This segued into asking each learner to discuss banking/financial transactions in their home countries. This led to a discussion of bartering and the financial rights of women in their home countries. The class ended with a game of “apples to apples”, which led to conversations based on the sentences formulated by each learner.

4. Were there formal assessments during the session?

There was no notable assessment conducted other than some verification that all learners understood each others’ points/stories. The focus was on keeping the conversation going and the learners engaged in the topics under discussion, including the individuals’ journeys and realities.

5. Is there something from the observation that really stands out?

The thing that stood out to me was the teacher's ability to keep the conversation going and all the learners engaged in the topic and one another.

The teachers' day job was in finance but she taught grades 4-6 for several years previously. She had a command of the classroom and an understated way of keeping the learners engaged and curious. She also helped them feel confident enough to participate in conversation despite challenges with verbal communication.

6. What approach to teaching did the instructor take? Was it taught implicitly or explicitly?

It was a class of long standing in which the teacher had established professional relationships with the students. She knew something of their varied backgrounds. She introduced a topic (banking) using money-related idioms like "break the bank", "in the red". She introduced a topic that each learner may have experienced in a different way. Each learner went on to explain how financial transactions were conducted in their countries, including the rights of women in conservative Muslim society. In taking this approach, the teacher incorporated at least two of the six principles of exemplary teaching: 1) know your learners and 2) create conditions for language learning and 3) engage and collaborate.