Saraí Vázquez
Observation Report
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I. Introduction

In this document, I will describe a teacher and her students in an observation I did in a false beginner English as Second Language (ESL) class at the University of Texas. The purpose of this report is to reflect on the teacher’s teaching strategies and class environment in relation with what I have learned in my Teaching Methods class. Throughout this paper, a variety of students’ and teacher’s behavior will be discussed that will be analyzed in the reflection section.

II. Before the Observation

After I arranged a day and time to go observe the ESL teacher, she asked me if we could meet a few minutes before the class to give me a brief overview about the class. We discussed class size and level; there were ten students who were beginners. The teacher said that the focus of this class is reading and her goal is to use reading activities to help them develop second language acquisition. We also briefly discussed the activities that they were going to be doing that day. The students were working on a reading assignment about the five senses and were also learning about pronouns. Then, she told me that at the beginning of class she was going to tell the students that I was going to be an observer and that at the end of class she was going to let me introduce myself to the class. Thus, I politely accepted her suggestion.

III. During the Observation

In this section, a chronological list of events including students and teacher interaction during my observation of the class will be listed.

- Teacher and students talk about the five senses and it seems that they talked about this topic in the previous lessons.
- Teacher tells students to do a list of things that they like to eat. The students compare their list with their partners to see if it’s similar (5 minutes).
- Teacher asks, “What did you get the same?” Some of the students’ responses are: “hamburger, chicken, and pizza”.
- After the students reviewed their answers out-loud, the teacher tells them to open their book to page 66. Later, the teacher asks the students to pronounce some words
from their book like “watermelon” and “strawberry” and she asks if they have a sweet tooth. The students don’t understand what the teacher is talking about, so she decides to explain that a sweet tooth is a strong appetite for sweets.

- After the discussion, the students were told to work with their partner to answer some true and false questions from their book. Students are supposed to tell the teacher how do they know if the statement is true or false (10 minutes).

- After that, the teacher goes over some vocabulary words that were in the workbook that they were using. She then asks: “what’s the word that means a part of the body that we use to smell?” students respond: "nose". "What’s a word that means a connection to people and ideas?” Students’ respond: "relationship”.

- All students exchange language by comparing their answers with each other and checking their work.

- Teacher tells students to write their answer for the questions presented in their books.

- Teacher explains a group of three students who were struggling how to figure out the answer by telling them a strategy. Teacher also repeats vocabulary words so that students improve their pronunciation.

- Once the students finish their answers, one student writes his answers on the board and the rest of the students check their own answer to see if they were correct.

- There was one instance where the teacher had to stop the girl who was writing the answers on the board to explain the word “ones”. The teacher explains that in this case it’s OK to have “ones” as a plural word because it refers to a pronoun. She then asks the students to tell her other pronouns and she writes them on the board while the students actively participate.

- Teacher shows a Chinese fan and she asks: “Do you know what this is?” the students respond: “fan”. Thus, the teacher writes the word on the board. She also shows them two bells and a set of markers and she asked them the same question above.

- Teacher tells students to look at some examples provided in the book that talks about pronouns. Then students work individually in a pronouns section from the book. In the mean time, the teacher walks around the class to assist the other students (10 minutes).
Teacher shows students a reading from the book on a projector. She tells them to underline all the pronouns she already underlined in her reading. The reading was about the “sense of taste”. While students were underlining the pronouns, she walks around and checks that the students have the same number of pronouns.

Teacher tells students to draw an arrow to the sentence or word that the pronoun refers to. Example: *Taste is one of our five senses. The others are hearing.* In this case, the word *others* refers to the five senses.

Some students were sending text-messages to each other instead of doing their work. The teacher caught them and took away their cell phones.

Later, the teacher explains to their students the importance of understanding their reading assignment and that is why she assigned the pronouns activity. The next activity will be to write a topic from each paragraph and the paragraph’s controlling idea.

The teacher presents a prompting question to give her students an example of how to get a main point and controlling idea. She writes the word Austin as the topic and asks students to tell her something about Austin. After the students comment on what they know about Austin, she tells them to look for a topic and controlling idea from their reading of “The five senses” and to underline them (15 minutes).

After the students identify the topic and main idea individually, the teacher asks for volunteers to tell her what they did and while the students are telling her she underlines the controlling ideas from each paragraph (10 minutes).

Students go for a ten-minute break.

After the students come back from their break they continue working on the previous assignment mentioned above. A group of students did not seem to understand the assignment, as they were just starring at the paper and looking around, so the teacher noticed this behavior and went to assist those particular students.

After this activity, the students take out a book that they were assigned to read the week before. Then, they have to find another person that has a different book and sit with him/her to discuss the summary of their books (20 minutes).

Last, the teacher closes the lesson for the day and assigns homework from their workbook and tells students to be prepared for the next class meeting.
IV. Post class interview

After the class was over, the teacher and I talked about the class. According to the teacher’s interview, she said that her students’ ethnic background, age, and first language varies: there are six students from Brazil whose native language is Portuguese; two students from Mexico whose native language is Spanish; and three students from Japan whose native language is Japanese. All of the students’ level is beginner, however, there are some students who understand English more than others. The majority of the students are teenagers who just graduated from High School and two other students are adults. In addition, the students’ purpose for studying English also varies. The majority of the High School students are on scholarships and they want to learn English because they want to enter the University of Texas. However, they need to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in order to prove that they have proficiency in the language to be taking courses in English. The other students just want to learn English for personal and professional purposes.

Furthermore, the teacher mentioned that in the previous class, the students learned about the five senses, pronouns, and vocabulary words related to body parts. For this reason, in this class the students were practicing what they learned in the previous class. In addition, in the next class the students will be reading a composition related to relationships and they will have to discuss it in class. They were also assigned some questions that go with the reading. The students were also given a short book to read and the assignment to write a summary of it in their reading log. The teacher said that the students also would be encouraged to share their summaries with the rest of the class.

In addition, I asked the teacher how she thought the class went and she said that the students always try their best even though their English skills are very low. She also mentioned that most of the time she accomplishes or tries to accomplish her lesson goals. She felt that today’s observation
was successful even though sometimes she has to deal with minor behavior problems from a few students. Other than that, she said that students are motivated to learn English so she tries to meet their needs by providing activities that will allow them to communicate with each other in the target language. The teacher also said that the main focus of the class is reading, so she has to provide an activity that meet that purpose and that is why they did a reading activity during my observation. Last, she felt that the activities presented during my observation were successful because all of the students were participating, answering questions, asking clarifying questions and interacting with each other during the group activities.

V. Reflection after the observation

In sum, the lesson design was well organized and the teacher was able to achieve the lesson goals for that day because all the activities that she had planned for were successfully accomplished. She also gave enough time to her students to work on the group activities and went over the answers as a whole class. I think it is important that she lets her students discuss the students’ reading assignment in groups because small group activities allow students to develop oral proficiency (Hadley 2001). I also agree with Hadley (2001) and Lightbown (2000) that group activities give the opportunity to correct errors by listening to how others speak and by receiving feedback.

Also, the activities presented in this class were appropriate for the students’ level even though there were some instances were they were being challenged. For example, there were two students who were just staring at the book because they did not understand the instructions of the assignment (they were supposed to underline the controlling idea of each paragraph from a reading). As a result, the teacher approached these students and modeled the instructions again by using gestures and pictures. This behavior relates to the Total Physical Response (TPR) method where teacher uses gestures, pictures, and dramatic flair to convey meaning (Horwitz 2008). Also, the
method was successful because the students were able to do their work after the teacher redirect the
instructions. In addition, the teacher and students were prepared with all the material they needed to
perform the activities that they did in class.

Furthermore, the teacher’s communication and pronunciation was very clear and slow for the
purpose of allowing students to comprehend what she was saying. There were few instances
were she indirectly corrected the students’ pronunciation when they were going over a list of
vocabulary words. However, she corrected errors gently, which is one of the guidelines suggested
by Horwitz (2008). She repeated the word more times and encouraged students to repeat the word
too. Moreover, the teacher presented a variety of learning activities for the students to participate
and they were engaged and motivated to learn. In addition, during the break, the students were so
exited to talk to me in English because they recognized the importance of practicing their
communication skills in English in order to become proficient.

Overall, observing this ESL class was a good experience for me as a future educator because
I was able to see that students’ motivation varies according to their age and educational interest for
learning a language. I also enjoyed observing a class with teenagers because I never taught
tenagers so I didn’t know what was like to teach language to older students compared to young
learners. As a result, after observing this class, I would like to try teaching Spanish as a foreign
language to teenagers or adults because I found it to be very interesting.

References