

To: Katie Dodd
From: Randy Reina
Re: Notes from my classroom observation on February 1, C Period.
Date: 2/8/22

Prior to the start of class, you were projecting on the front board the day's, "Bellringer" activity. This routine prepared students for the beginning of class, and, via icons, showed them what materials (computer, pencil, etc.) they would need for class. This was clearly a routine that students were comfortable with. In addition, you had written the day's agenda on the front of the board, which also included upcoming assignments that were due. The routines clearly alleviated the many questions that students often ask as to what they will be doing that day when they arrive in the classroom.

As students entered the room and found their places, you engaged with them in light, joking conversation. The interactions indicated both the professional and close relationship that you have built with the students. They were comfortable talking and joking with you. Your sense of humor permeated the class and made for an easygoing pre-class atmosphere.

As the class began, you fielded questions about the upcoming Flower Project that was due in two days. Your responses included explanations of "why" you made certain expectations for the project. For example, you explained why you had set a size requirement, which, once explained seemed to make sense to the students. During this Q&A period, your classroom presence was both commanding and comforting – not always an easy balance to achieve. An example of how you accomplished this was your explanation of the presentation requirement. You both set the expectation and alleviated the stress by reiterating that the presentations would be un-graded and gave them an out if they were uncomfortable presenting their work.

The class consisted of two major activities: 1) Each student brainstormed 10 animals and then shared that list with the entire class, and 2) Categorization of several animal picture cards using animals that the students were likely not familiar with. The first activity was intended to show how we are more familiar with mammals compared to insects or other types of organisms. After students shared their lists of animals with the whole class, you led a Q&A session of why this might be the case.

Again, your sense of humor helped keep the discussion lively as well as helped drive home your point. For example, you stated, "When we are young children the books that are read to us don't say things like, 'This is what the centipede says,' like they might say, 'This is what a cow says.'"

The second activity asked students to categorize several cards with pictures of organisms. Students worked in groups of 3 or 4 to decide how to categorize these. You allowed them to come up with their own systems of categorization and your comments helped alleviate the potential stress of this inductive instructional approach: "You may not know some of the animals... Just look at the picture and make your best guess as to where it should go."

As groups worked through the activity you walked from group to group, made suggestions and asked them questions to keep them on task and on time. Your discussions with students during this time was both informative and interesting. If a student asked a slightly off task question, you might extend the thought – maybe with an example – then pull the discussion back to topic. In this way, you both verified and confirmed the student's question AND kept the discussion on task. Comments to the class such as,

"Now start to write down your groups and list the animals that you put in the groups," helped ensure that students would finish on time and be ready for the final stage of the activity. In addition, you wrote the stop time on the front board: "Work time until 11:00 am." During this period you made sure to check in with each of the groups multiple times.

Each group recorded their categorization results and shared their system of categorization with other groups. During the entire class you made it a point to reinforce good student behavior. For example, during this sharing time you noticed that a group could not find another group to share their results with, and that a student said, "I've already compared with other people, but I'll compare with you as well." You stated, "Thanks for doing that, Ari... Way to be a good pal and help out."

The final part of the class activity asked students to complete a Canvas assignment to submit answers to a few questions regarding the class activity. Students were able to discuss the questions with classmates but were to submit individual responses. To help keep the students on schedule, you wrote final directions on the board as well as explained them: "When you finish, submit it and then can work on the Flower Project." In addition, you called out the remaining class time in 5-minute increments.

Throughout the class you seemed to enjoy the interaction with the students. Both during large class and small group interactions, your demeanor was both professional, indicating the importance of the work that the students were engaged in, and light-hearted, allowing the students to feel comfortable interacting with you. Your comments and answers to questions ranged from scientific names and explanations to a discussion of the difference between, "Gesundheit, and Bless you" after a sneeze.

Students were continually engaged in each class activity. They remained on task and were focused on completing it by the end of class. During the last few minutes of class, you asked students to, "find your way back to your seat," as you distributed results of a quiz. As you did so, you reminded students that they have the power not to share their grade with other students by saying, "Remember you can say, 'Gentle neighbor, I have nothing but the utmost respect for you, but my grade is my own business.'" As the class ended you dismissed students individually when you saw that they had stood and pushed their chairs in."