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Introduction

The assignment task at hand was to observe an experienced teacher, preferably with a formal qualification, within a specific area of the curriculum, leading to the production of this report.

In order to fulfil the above assignment task I have liased with Mr. X at ABC College and he graciously agreed without any hesitation to allow me to observe one of his Business Studies classes at the main campus of ABC College.

I chose to undertake my observation on Mr. X at the Hall Green campus of ABC College for several reasons. Firstly, it is not my current place of employment (teaching practice) so therefore I felt I could be more impartial with regards to the staff member I was to observe. Secondly, Mr. X does not teach in my personal subject area, which I felt would give me the ability to concentrate more on the teaching as opposed to the subject matter and thirdly I chose the Hall Green campus of ABC College due to its local proximity to my own living arrangements.

On Thursday 25th March 2004 I observed Mr. X on his HNC Business, year 1 of a 2-year course, detailed later. Due to the issued arising from this observation as will become apparent to the reader I then observed Mr. X for a second time on Tuesday 30th March 2004 on his HND Business, year 1 of a 2-year course.

For the purpose of the report I shall address the observation in the following manner. I shall report on the Initial pre-lesson briefing with teacher, the initial arrival at the lesson briefly to compare to the teachers expectations as discussed in said briefing. I shall then look at the observation in depth as per the observation notes sheet I used (Appendix 1.) This contains eight subheadings, which shall make up the eight sections I shall further assess in this report.

Observation - 25th March 2004

Pre-lesson Briefing

This is a HNC Business course, year 1, of a 2-year course. There are 10 students all aged 19 or over of a mixed race and sex background, there are no known issues relating to any of the students, they are varying abilities and are all keen to work, it is noted that the female members of the group tend to be the students with the slightly higher ability. The scheme of work for the course has been devised assuming the students have no prior knowledge of the subject. None of the group are regularly disruptive or regularly late without notice. The session is for 2hrs with no break, which has been agreed with the students at the start of the course in order for them to possibly leave earlier at the end of most lessons. The class takes place in a general classroom with a horseshoe layout of tables and chairs, enough for each student and a whiteboard at front with a working overhead projector provided for the use of the teacher.

Lesson

On arrival to the lesson the teacher found that only four of the expected students had arrived, all others had left messages with colleagues to notify their absenteeism from the lesson. It was announced that this was due to an assignment, which was due to be submitted the following day. The remaining four students also expressed a wish to have time to 'finish off' their assignments and as this was agreed by all it was mutually decided that the lesson would no longer be held as planned but instead the teacher turned the time slot into a 'tutorial' style session where the students attending were free to leave or alternatively discuss the said assignment with him in order to complete it to be submitted.

My personal reflections on this incident were that the teacher handled the situation in the best manner possible to him. Should he have insisted on continuing with the lesson it was obvious that there would be a large number of students who would have 'missed out' on vital learning time and also the students who were in attendance would have more likely than not been very de-motivated to actively learn anything themselves. Also the tutorial session created did give the students that stayed the feeling that it was worth there while attending anyway, as they got something out of the lesson that their colleagues who didn't attend wouldn't have.

However that said the question the situation does raise to me is one of the initial scheme of work. In future maybe it would be wiser to not schedule a rigid lesson for the time slot less than 24 hours before a major assignment is to be submitted. Maybe in future it would be wiser to leave this time slot as a tutorial session for people to get, albeit 'last minute', feedback on the assignment or even simply leave the slot as a 'study' time. This way the students will hopefully feel less pressured when it comes to completing this assignment.

Observation - 20th March 2004

Pre-lesson Briefing

This is a HND Business course, year 1, of a 2-year course. There are 15 students usually in attendance however the teacher has been made aware of a high number of absentees for the day due to a combination of the approaching Easter Holidays and also other assignment submission dates for other subjects being studied by the group. The group again is of a mixed, race and sex background and there are no known issues relating to any of the students. They are varying abilities and are all keen to work, it is noted that the female members of the group tend to be the students with the slightly higher ability. The scheme of work for the course has been devised assuming the students have no prior knowledge of the subject. None of the group are regularly disruptive or regularly late without notice. The lesson is for 1hr, therefore there is no break scheduled. The class takes place in a general classroom (room HA009) with a horseshoe layout of tables and chairs, enough for each student and a whiteboard at front with a working overhead projector provided for the use of the teacher.

Lesson

On arrival to the lesson it was found that again only four of the students enrolled on the course were in attendance. The course is a degree level course so no register is taken and attendance is not mandatory. The teacher had already been notified of a number of absentee's and all others were accounted for again by the method of colleagues being asked to inform the teacher of absenteeism. The students who were in attendance however where all 'ready to learn' with papers and pens out, sitting at desks awaiting the arrival of the teacher.

Goals and Purpose

The lessons goals were clearly stated at the beginning of the session, the teacher used the whiteboard to do this and related the students to their scheme of work which had been given to them at the start of the course. The subject of the day was instantly related back to the previous session and indeed to sessions, which had predated that one.

This allowed the learners to see that what they were about to learn was in context with the rest of the course. This is imperative, so the learners are able to see that there is, to coin a phrase, 'method in the madness'.

As Knowles (1983) says one of the major differences between the andragogical and pedagogical learner is that a child is more likely to allow itself to be guided towards learning yet the adult needs to know **why** they are learning anything before they will allow themselves to learn.

Planning

A well known, unattributable saying, used in many fields is "failing to plan is planning to fail". This is never truer than in teaching and therefore was an imperative part of my observation.

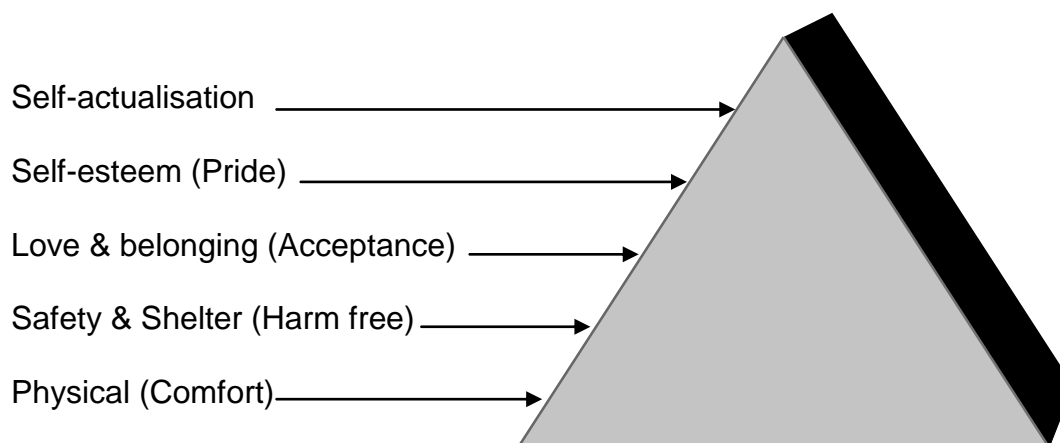
The planning of the lesson had been excellently undertaken. All of the teachers' notes for the lesson were easily at hand both before hand and during the session itself. Each student had previously been provided with a scheme of work 'pack' for the entirety of the course, which also included thinking points for the entire course, and handouts, which would be used throughout the duration of the course. I initially thought this would be a problem as students could be likely to waylay these previously given 'packs' and therefore not have required handouts when needed, however this did not appear the case as the students all appeared to have them at hand and in fact they appeared to almost guard these packs with their life as if it was the 'bible' for the course; this didn't however stop plenty of notes being taken. The teacher did also assure me there were 'spares' available should anyone forget or lose theirs.

Along with the scheme of work 'packs' provided the teacher also used the whiteboard in conjunction with the overhead projector. Now it is not advised to project transparencies onto a whiteboard due to reflections that can be given which may obscure class members vision however in this lesson it proved that one of the benefits of this is that ideas from the class could be added to the teachers transparencies without having to write directly onto them but by using the whiteboard in much the same way as interactive 'smart' boards can be used. This gave the students greater ownership of the lesson, and they responded by appearing to take more interest in the lesson as if they felt that their input was wanted, required, appreciated and respected.

Content and Presentation

The teacher appeared to have a first class knowledge of the subject matter himself, this was shown to the students by his ability to answer most of their questions and lead on from this into discursive conversation which was done with quite an enthusiasm which did show through to the students.

This in itself goes along way to helping on the way to satisfying the 'love and belonging' element on the hierarchy of basic needs discussed by Maslow (1962) in his motivational theory



Maslow (1962) Hierarchy of Needs applied to the classroom. Taken from Reece I. & Walker S. Teaching, Training & Learning. Business Education Publishers Ltd 2003.

The love and belonging aspect refers to the learner being shown that the teacher cares, promoting interaction between learners and teachers and promoting cohesion within the learning environment. To this end I feel that by the teacher showing enthusiasm in his or her subject (as was shown by the teacher I observed) in conjunction with the subject appearing to be pitched at a level the students both understood and where able to discuss, the students can themselves get a feeling of being 'loved' and like they 'belong'.

As briefly mentioned above it also appeared that the subject area was pitched at a level the students could easily understand and the pace of the level, though lively, was also not too fast and indeed at one point a student did ask the teacher to repeat a point and the teacher obliged without hesitation to make sure that all of the class understood the point being made. At this point of the lesson the teacher also made it clear to the entire class that if at any time during the lesson anyone didn't understand any particular point to speak up. To this end the teacher student rapport was excellent; this is discussed more later. In keeping with the topic of content and presentation the teacher spoke with a clear voice and could easily be heard by the entire group, over and above a slight noise coming from works being carried out outside the classroom, which were beyond the control of the teacher.

Atmosphere and Relationships

The classroom layout as previously mentioned was a traditional horseshoe style, which is ideal for the discursive nature of the session. The teacher stood at the apex of the horseshoe and wandered about some, as well as sitting amongst the students at other stages. There appeared to be a mutual respect achieved within this particular classroom. It was clear to see that the students and teacher had a good rapport. There was some friendly badinage at times during the session as well as the ability for the students to 'talk around' a subject. While keeping the students thinking along the lines of the lesson plan being followed there was no harm in the students making examples which maybe they found they could relate to and understand more.

Examples of this were when one student related a topic area (monopolies) to the shop she worked in at weekends as they sell school uniforms for certain private schools where only they have the sole 'rights' to sell the product.

Also when talking about the car industry the subject slipped onto James Bond cars as Aston Martin had been mentioned.

Now though these specifics are not what were in the lesson plan, the teachers relationship with the students was such that he was able to incorporate these examples into the lesson, again giving the feeling of inclusion to the students.

The Student Experience

The students appeared to both enjoy and appreciate the lesson. For one there was no rush to leave by any of the students at the end of the lesson, in fact one or two wanted to talk further about the lesson after the allotted time was at an end; although this could have been for any number of extraneous reasons.

Throughout the lesson the teacher used many forms of 'teaching' aids to both keep the attention of the students and illustrate points being made. These aids were the whiteboard, overhead projector and associated overhead transparencies, handouts were in the form of both text from a newspaper cutting relevant to the subject area, text from overhead transparencies used and a case study. These aids were all used by the group in several different teaching activities.

The teacher provided an initial 'team teach' on the subject of the session, the group then discussed some specific figures together as a group, these were provided on the overhead projector as well as on a handout. The teacher then used the whiteboard to outline the points they had concluded from these discussions. All along the teacher checked and corrected the students by use of simple question and answering. At first the students were hesitant with replies however the teacher used the technique of answering the first question himself to get the students to be more forthcoming with responding and from then on the students obliged. This part of the session allowed the students to 'gain knowledge' which was to be used in the case study to be looked at next.

The class were then given a case study (Appendix 2.1), which they were to all look at individually and make notes on the associated questions then discuss further in pairs after. At this point the teacher individually helped the students whilst 'mingling' and after relevant time brought all of the findings together again on the whiteboard.

The case study was specifically chosen as both a topical and relevant subject to fit in with the lesson plan. In changing the activity the students were kept alert within the classroom and given more responsibility for their own learning. They seemed to respond well to this and although the noise level obviously went up, and it could have appeared a more disruptive classroom was awoken, all of the conversation appeared to the observer to be relevant and 'on message'. This case study exercise also provided much needed **differentiation** within the classroom after a period of more traditional 'talk and chalk' activity.

Following this activity the students discussed a little further with the teacher 'what can be learnt from what they've just done?' This is used as a form of ongoing assessment to once again affirm that learning has taken place within the lesson. One area where there could possibly be improvement that I did notice here was that perhaps the teacher could have been more enthusiastic in his praise of students when they were correct with answers, other than this

though it appeared to work well in checking and correcting the learner and making sure that the correct learning was taking place.

The, confirmed by the case study and subsequent check and correct exercise as, 'learnt' knowledge was then taken into a final 'warming down' exercise used by the teacher. A handout of a cutting from a newspaper was issued to all of the students with another case to discuss, this was done as a whole group and at this point the teacher sat with the students so as to appear 'as one' with them. Then a general, yet guided, conversation ensued with the students able to use their newly acquired knowledge to dissect the nuances of the subject of the handout. This again gave full control of the learning to the student as well as giving the student an indirect feeling of achievement to reassure to them that they had indeed learnt something during the lesson, achieving what Gardener. J. W. says is the ultimate aim of the educational system.

"The ultimate aim of the educational system is to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education"

I did also notice that during the use of both handouts and overhead projections special notice was made by the teacher to both the length of time given to read the handouts, as well as the duration of which the overhead transparency was left visible to the class. After reading the handout (Appendix 2.2 – Virgin rail accused of abusing its monopoly) the teacher did ask a specific question relating directly to the passage, which could only be answered by the student if they had read the passage. This I thought was an excellent way of attempting to make sure that the time given to read the handout was actually used as intended.

Again however one slight point for possible consideration in all of this was that maybe the overhead projector was infact left on for too long. After the class had had plenty of time to copy any information from it that they wanted, it could still be heard humming in the background; even when not being used as part of the lesson. This along with having a possible effect of burning out the bulb could also become an irritant and distraction to the class.

Resources

As previously discussed a lot of time and effort had obviously gone into the planning of the resources to be used in the session.

- Scheme of Work 'pack'
- Chalk and talk
- Whiteboard
- Overhead Projector
- Overhead Transparencies
- Transparency on Handout
- Case Study Handout
- Newspaper Cutting Handout

The teacher used all of the above resources. All were pitched at the appropriate level for the students and all were legible and/or easily seen or heard by the students. The activities varied throughout the session as appropriate for the subject matter and notice was taken to health and safety throughout. That said a point had to be made at the end of the lesson, as one student was leaving, not to trip over the overhead projector cable.

Achievement of Objectives

As the lesson drew to an end the teacher recapped the session which had just been undertaken and used a final question and answer session to ensure learning had taken place.

The teacher then related the lesson again back to previous lessons which had been undertaken in the scheme of work as well as taking a couple of minutes to briefly outline what work was going to be begun in the coming sessions which were now to be after the Easter holidays. The teacher also took this opportunity to re-acknowledge when the students were next expected to attend, as the next session would be after the Easter holidays.

At this point a couple of students left the room while another couple stayed to discuss further in a one-to-one manner specific subject points which had arisen during the lesson.

Professionalism

The teacher arrived slightly early for the lesson although the students were already there themselves and keen to begin. The lesson as a consequence to this both began and finished early. Both teacher and students appearance was one conducive to learning and it appeared that there was mutual respect given and received by both student and teacher in the room. To this end I felt the teacher acted fully professional throughout the lesson and gave the students ample opportunity to learn.

De-briefing

After the lesson the teacher and myself had a brief discussion about the lesson and his feelings following it. The teacher felt that the session went well and learning had taken place.

One of the teacher's key ideas is that of the student learning through experiences and he himself mentioned to me the use of Kolb's theory of experiential learning.

This does not necessarily mean that the student directly has an 'experience' within the lesson or even has to experience something in their extra-curricular life to enable them to learn but more a case of relating the subject matter to experiences they may have or may understand.

One example of this is the case study being about a topic, which they can relate to i.e. the cost of replica football shirts, another being the student who worked in a shop which held a monopoly, or even relating a subject of mergers in the car industry to the James Bond films that had been watched and the Aston Martin and BMW cars that occur in them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I consider this whole exercise a very worthwhile experience, I think Mr, X taught a fine lesson with only a couple of points for possible improvement as stated during the writing of this report.

All in all, the lesson was very straight forward as an observer; there were no flash points during the observation. At no point did a student enter late or did the teacher have a disruptive student to negotiate. At the same time the teacher never seemed lost during the lesson and wasn't caught out by a student asking a question he didn't know the answer to.

The teacher differentiated when required and changed activities throughout the session in an attempt to keep the students learning at a constant high. He also performed a lot of check and correct activities as on going assessment throughout the session to ensure that the learning outcomes being striven for were actually being achieved.

I have written to thank Mr. X for helping me with this assignment in the manner in which he did and included a copy with this report. (Appendix 3.)

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