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Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

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TESOL Final Paper

Throughout this class we learned the theories and techniques necessary for being a successful teacher. In working at Beman I was able to apply these techniques directly with my students. I had the privilege of working with 3 different students at Beman but spent most of my time there helping Eliana and Esperanza; two girls from Peru and Mexico respectively with varying levels of English proficiency. My experience at Beman was particularly successful because I was able to work within a school context and aid my students in their classes. Watching our class strategies being actively employed by the middle school teachers was incredibly useful in understanding concepts from class. Furthermore, because I have never participated in a tutoring program before, I did not have the experience leading full lesson plans. Beman provided a great alternative option where I could work with students on their individual assignments and ease into my own lessons. I did not have many opportunities to work with my students independently from their class assignments and therefore did not have a chance to try out certain strategies; however, I think the most valuable knowledge that I gained from Beman was the ability to see certain concepts play out in real time and really get to know the students on a holistic level. Watching the social aspects of education and classroom management was incredibly valuable.

Throughout my time working at Beman I have become increasingly confident in my application of certain concepts. First, with Esperanza, I noticed that her sociolinguistic and communicative competence were incredibly well developed. The disparity between her

communication skills and her written skills was really interesting as the only exposure I have had to learning a language is through a controlled classroom environment, where the written skills usually develop much faster than the oral skills. In working with Esperanza I most often made use of the error correction skills that we learned in class. Since her spoken English and spoken grammar was so strong, I rarely had to correct her while speaking. Sometimes I would prompt a certain word she was stuck on or use the reformulation of her own sentences as I would respond back to her. For example, if she was describing her independent reading to me and said “the sisters in my book are fight”, I could respond with “oh the sisters in your book are fighting”. This was hugely productive as most of the time she would then recognize her mistake and repeat the correct phrase one more time before moving on. Furthermore, I tried to remain cognizant of everything we had learned about motivation by getting her to focus less on finding the one right answer and more on making sure we talk about parts of the homework that were interesting for her or that she wanted to know more about. Developing more of an intrinsic motivation for her work rather than painstakingly trying to find the one correct response. Also within the topic of motivation, using language games as a reward for finishing homework was a successful way to extrinsically motivate Esperanza.

Second, with Eliana, the process looked a little bit different. Eliana’s first day at any US school was also my first day working at Beman. She moved from Peru with her family part way through the semester and did not speak any English her first days. Watching as Esperanza would explain assignments to her and help her in understanding the concepts was always uplifting. There was a noticeable difference on the days that Esperanza and Eliana were working together versus separately. Esperanza provided great motivation to Eliana as they could work together and problem solve different assignments. With Eliana, I relied a bit on my Spanish skills to

communicate with her. I mostly worked with Eliana on her science homeworks so, at the beginning of our sessions, I would use Spanish to make sure that she understood the scientific concepts before we wrote down the correct answers in English. As our time progressed working together, I tried to incorporate more and more English, asking her to first identify any words in English that she was familiar with and using Spanish more as a next resort. Watching how quickly Eliana progressed while being fully immersed in English school was truly impressive.

Overall, I learned so much from working in person at Beman with my students. I was able to observe the classroom management of other teachers, the kinds of assignments that were most challenging or most rewarding for the students, and how much the enjoyment of our actual time in school can affect our motivations for learning.

In the class as a whole I learned mostly about how important the work outside of the classroom is. While classroom management and being learner-centered in your teaching is valuable, pre-planning lessons and being thoughtful to include a variety of assignments that will build up different skills for your students is crucial. Thinking about appealing to the multiple intelligences of your learners creates room for students with very different strengths and learning styles to each excel in the course. Understanding the processing demands of certain assignments and knowing that, if you are to introduce a new grammar concept, a learner's speaking or writing proficiency might drop because of the new demand. This will help as a teacher to know why certain assignments or examinations can be more difficult than others. Furthermore, it is important in order to understand how to challenge your students without making something completely impossible.

I have always enjoyed working with kids and have spent the last several summers as a camp counselor in the Adirondacks; however, working with kids in a more academic setting was

incredibly fulfilling. Watching students respond to a tough assignment or persevere through a difficult reading taught me many things about what it means to be an engaged learner; something I think we often lose sight of as we get older. After taking this course I am interested in a possible career in education. Being surrounded by the kind of energy and excitement that was present at Beman was rewarding on its own. I think that within education, this class opened my eyes to the importance of learner centered teaching and understanding background disparities amongst your students. Many of the chapters we studied throughout the semester spoke to the importance of understanding the properties and functions of a student's L1 when teaching them and L2 or L3. Acknowledging this kind of information transfer and students' learning superpowers is one of the most useful things I will be taking away from this class. The program we worked through with Ms. Ballenchino helped me to realize how much of a difference a little bit of one-on-one support can make.

The class in general exceeded my expectations in engagement with the topics, participation and energy throughout the class, and overall enjoyment of the subject matter. Not only were we able to practice the concepts we learned about with our tutees, I also saw them being utilized in our own classroom with a variety of exercises or assignments to facilitate meaningful reflections about each chapter or term. I thoroughly enjoyed working with my classmates on group presentations and tutoring check-ins. Our passion for this class made the sessions enjoyable and there was a sense of community that came with all of the group work and supporting one another. This class environment is something I have rarely ever experienced at Wesleyan.