

Planning a Teaching Session - My Reflection

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I was very fortunate to be matched up with my practicum mentor, Birgit Jensen. Her involvement and feedback have not only been necessary but greatly valued.

My literacy organization I work for asked if I could fill in for a co-worker and instruct a writing skills class two times a week for three weeks. The purpose of the class was to prepare learners to write the Language Arts Writing portion of the GED. The first two classes went well but I felt overwhelmed.

Thankfully, I met with Birgit at the end of that first week. I made a lesson plan, but I wasn't confident about it. I had evaluated my learners, and although they had different weaknesses, there were also many similarities. I wanted to give them as much information as I could, and I told Birgit this when I showed her my lesson plan. Birgit certainly *marked* my lesson plan *with confidence*! She informed me that I was on the right track and made suggestions to improve and build upon what I had.

One thing I needed help with was trying to ground myself at the beginning of class. I explained to Birgit that I was a little chatty sometimes and found it tough to get started. Birgit suggested a starter activity which I have successfully incorporated into the beginning of every class.

I planned to cover many topics in the two hour classes. Birgit didn't criticize, but tactfully questioned my cramming method rather than spending more time on one topic. She asked me: "Is it better to focus a little longer on one topic to insure comprehension and cover other topics in the next session, or try to cover a lot in shorter time frames in one session?" I would only be able to answer that after I carried out my lesson plan.

I felt inspired. Birgit's enthusiasm and knowledge made we want to work harder for my learners. We had the same opinion on many issues and this boosted my confidence. When we parted, the overwhelmed feeling I had was replaced with enthusiasm. I couldn't wait to modify and present my new lesson plan.

When my class met, I was ready! I began with the starter activity: I wrote a grammar riddle on the board and asked the class to solve it. They loved it! It was a great way for us to casually focus our minds on learning.

I thoroughly covered the first topic but I ran behind schedule for a number of reasons: some learners were late, there were many different skill levels, and the topic just took longer than I anticipated. Then we were almost out of time. I handed out and explained the differentiated homework I was giving to each learner and told them what we would be covering next class. I gave them an opportunity to give me input to what they liked

or didn't like about the class that day. There were only positive comments, but one learner didn't seem to grasp the skills we covered. I decided to sit with him during the next class while the other learners worked ahead.

Birgit suggested that I use a red, yellow, and green approach for evaluating. While the learners were reviewing their evaluations, I had them mark the appropriate colour next to the topics they wanted clarification on rated by importance. (Red means "I don't understand this", Yellow means "I need refreshing", and Green means "I got it!") I would include the topics that needed more clarification into a lesson.

Another great suggestion from Birgit was that I talk to learners one-on-one about their goals for the future. Although I would be their instructor for just a few weeks, this was valuable information to have. I used this knowledge to make the material relevant so the learners stayed interested and motivated.

My lesson planning ran smoothly after my first meeting with Birgit. Although I will always have a lesson plan for a class, I will alter it according to the variations of the learners. I no longer 'time' my lesson plans. I believe the learners grasped the information that I presented to them during the writing classes. I still feel a sense of responsibility as they go on to write their GED, but I also feel that I prepared them the best I could.

Having Brigit as my practicum mentor has been a valuable experience, and I will continue to adopt her suggested learning methods into my teaching. This practicum has encouraged me to become a more efficient and enthusiastic literacy practitioner!