

Field Journal Response for Week 2, Semester 2 *Identifying Effective Instructional Strategies*

Since my observations began in September, I have had the privilege of being able to view the school environment in many different contexts. Thanks to the encouragement and facilitation of my partner teacher, I have also been able to observe several other teachers within the school. In the past two weeks, I have visited 3 classrooms other than the one I typically observe. In doing so, I have been able to identify several examples of effective instructional strategies. Perhaps the best example of this in the past two weeks though came when I had the chance to observe Mr. Davidson's Grade 9 English Language Arts class. Mr. Davidson is highly regarded at FEO by his fellow colleagues for his inventiveness and organization, and once I began watching him teach it was evident his students also held him in an equally high regard. Other than the evidently strong relationships with his students, his instructional capacity was amongst the best I have seen at my field placement.

As part of the Grade 9 English Language Arts curriculum, students explore the English language through poetry, ballads, sonnets, and likewise creative and poetic writing. Carrying on with this component of the curriculum, on the day I observed Mr. Davidson's class he was quickly introducing the students to "Odes". The ode in particular he chose was titled, "Ode to a fly". The lesson began with a quick overview of a poem the class was working on the day before and then transitioned into what Mr. Davidson described as a "brief exposure to odes". During this transition, the class went from exploring the rhyme scheme of the previous day's example towards beginning to dissect the vocabulary and poetic devices used in the ode. Vocabulary is an obvious passion shared between Mr. Davidson and his students, evidenced by the countless 8 ½ x 11 student constructed posters of various words plastering the classroom walls. This shared enthusiasm was also evident in the way his class responded to every one of his questions with well thought out, intelligent, and respectable answers.

The strong relationships Mr. Davidson has with his students are unquestionably a major contributor to his overall instructional strategy. After his lesson, I told him how impressed I was with the level of participation that was evident during his lesson, to which he humbly attributed to the fact the class was his SVG (Student Voice Group) or Homeroom. He further explained that the few extra opportunities he has to bond with the class during altered schedules, report cards, etc. really make the difference. Technically, Mr. Davidson's instructional strategy seemed heavily dependent on active class participation. Beginning with a review of familiar material, which engaged students and elicited responses, Mr. Davidson's lesson then transitioned to the investigation of new material with a similar expectation of student involvement. Looking back, it is easy to assume that without such a high level of classroom participation, regardless of the motivation or reason, perhaps his approach may not have been as successful as it was.

During the conversation I had Mr. Davidson, the students began to move about the classroom, working on questions from the back of a ballad they had previously explored in class. I was overwhelmed with how their interest in the subject matter carried on even after the lesson had finished. As I saw it, the continued in-depth involvement and evidence of true learning I was witnessing was a reflection of an ongoing exercise Mr. Davidson had them doing where they were encouraged to memorize lines from ballads and poetry and then recite those lines in interesting ways. On one occasion such "interesting ways" came in the form of an impromptu class recital of the individual lines of "The Highway Man" during their Science class. Though he did not specifically declare this, to me it seems that with such strong personal relationships with his students, and with an engaging approach to the curriculum content, Mr. Davidson is another example of a master teacher at F.E. Osborne.

When I asked Mr. Davidson for his reason behind approaching the lesson in the way in which he did, he simply stated that he just want to introduce students to the ode as another form of poetry/creative writing. More generally, he described the introduction as a small enrichment of the ballad, sonnet, and poetry unit. For what planning went into the lesson I can't speak to in any great detail and can only assume that the objective being aimed for was simply an enrichment of the curriculum. Mr. Davidson's enactment of the lesson was, as described above, masterful and extremely well executed. This speaks to his experience, organization, inventiveness and the relationship he has built with the students. As far as assessment, it appeared that in keeping with his assertion of the introduction to the ode being simply for enrichment that his assessment came in the form of verifying his students' ability to read between and beneath the lines of text. Reflection and Insight for this specific lesson weren't made as evident as the other components of the instructional inquiry cycle. This may be due in part to the fact that the activity was merely enrichment, but much more likely has to do with the fact that with years of experience as both an administrator and teacher, Mr. Davidson has this cycle deeply engrained in his practice.

By far the most impactful part of observing Mr. Davidson teach was witnessing the relationship he has with his students and how he aroused class participation early on in the period and sustained it right on through to the bell. The reason I found this meaningful was because of how personally relevant I found it. I feel confident and capable in arousing participation, however one of the challenges I find is sustaining the participation throughout the class. Perhaps this is just an inevitable reality of teaching. Some classes will be more likely to sustain interest than others. I know this to be true already having a similar paradigm between the two grade 8 as well as with the two grade 9 classes I observe. Either way, what I witnessed by observing Mr. Davidson's class was an excellent example of the mastery one can come to in teaching, where by instructional strategy truly becomes an embodiment of the teacher and moves away from being a theoretical exploration.