

## Field Journal Response for Week 4, Semester 2 *Reflecting on Student Engagement & Classroom Management*

Since my first week back at FEO this semester I have been working with my partner teacher to develop lesson plans for the grade 8 Humanities class and for the grade 9 English Language Arts class. One of the first lesson plans I began working on was a *Formal Debate* for the grade 9's as an introduction to writing argumentative or persuasive essays. As a precursor to the formal debate activity, I planned an *Introduction to Argument* lesson, whereby I would introduce the students to some central themes, definitions, and concepts related to argument. I began preparation on the debate activity as per my partner teacher's direction and was given fairly free license to come up with the topics for debate. From the time we first came to the agreement that a debate would be an excellent opportunity to introduce argumentative essays, there have been a few instances where I tried to involve and engage the students in the process.

Of the five debate topics needed to cover off the class, the first was of Ms. Peyto's invention and the others came from a discussion I had with the grade 9 class where I asked them what kind of things they might like to debate. As expected, topics ranged from the insightful and promising to the shallow and ridiculous. However, despite an overwhelming collection of simplistic debate topics, I was left with four general ideas which were an amalgamation of the best suggestions. The final four debate topics chosen were also of a cross-curricular nature; one on space (as per the science curriculum, one on censorship ( ELA and Social) and 3 others which encompassed the grade 9 social curriculum's investigation of collective vs. individual rights. Having included the students in the process of formulating the topics was an easy way to engage the students, and as I found out by an email from Ms. Peyto after the class discussion, the students seemed excited for the debate.

During the *Introduction to Argument* lesson, I tried my best to incorporate some kind of "hook" to engage the students in my lecture from its onset. I had learned a few days prior in class that some kind of enticing statement or question to begin a lesson was a good way to begin and engage students. In keeping with the theme of the lesson, I wrote: Everything is an argument, on the white board at the front of the room. I used this statement to launch into a class discussion, of which it was my aim, to allow students to start thinking about the concept of argument. We collectively discussed synonyms for argument, the concept of audience, and finally the introduction of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos. For most of the lesson, I felt as if the students were engaged in the learning, but am definitely aware of how I could have done a better job at making the lesson a bit more exciting. Aside from having to be facing the board while writing the terms, I felt my speech and presence in the room was well received, however know that the enthusiasm in my voice could have been improved. Following that, it also would have been beneficial to have written the notes down on the white board ahead of time, and to have supplemented some of the lecturing on Ethos, Pathos, and Logos with print or photo examples of each.

Understanding that the intro to argument and debate lessons would act as a precursor to argumentative and persuasive essays, I planned on using the information and experience

gained from these lessons as a form of formative assessment. The extent to which students have “gotten” the content of lesson has so far been something that is not exactly clear. Students were asked to fill out a work sheet I designed with their debate teammates, identifying the Ethos, Pathos, and Logos of their topic. For some groups this was easier than for others. Once the debates have finished, which should be next week, I plan on collecting these sheets for reflection, and to then plan a follow up to the debates and argument where the students will write a brief 1 page response to any side of their debate topic, its relationship to Ethos, Pathos, and Logos. This work will be used as a further piece of formative assessment, which in combination with the assessment of their debate will help me provide each student with an idea of how they can improve on their argumentation skills. Further, this will help me fulfill the inquiry cycle of planning where I can fully assess and reflect on how the lesson went and begin to rework the lesson plan so it will be better next time.

Having planned and executed the debates over the past 2 weeks, my awareness of classroom management has increased ten-fold. Beginning to think about classroom management last semester has truly become something at the forefront of my mind, and as I have come to realize, one of the most important elements of the teaching profession. I have seen several varying degrees of classroom management from both my own and other teachers at FEO, some utilizing strict and overt control, and others utilizing freedom, humor, and to a certain extent chaos. Just like a heartbeat must be rhythmic yet not repetitious, so too must the classroom. This has become even clearer through conversations with my partner teacher and other teachers in the school who agree that sometimes you just need to let the kids be free in the safe space of the classroom. Classroom management I have learned is an intensely personal part of one’s teaching style, and my own conception of what is or isn’t appropriate have changed with my increasing involvement in the classroom.

I can’t comment on any specific example of when my partner teachers classroom management skills were stretched, other than to say that overall, I would say that the threshold seems fairly wide. There haven’t been any major incidences in our classroom that have warranted a drastic response. I believe in total I have seen 2 students be asked to leave the classroom, and in both cases I feel like I would have done the same. Acting on and exercising my own beliefs as to how the classroom should be managed has been a slow process, and I expect will remain so for the simple fact the classroom isn’t mine. With time however, I feel confident in my ability to manage the classroom environment to the appropriate extent necessary. For the mean time thankfully, like so many aspects of my partner teacher, I find I often agree with the way things go down.