

Record 1. 26<sup>th</sup> September. 11.00 a.m. Year 9. Spanish.

### Where and When

In a year 9 Spanish lesson, I was interested in an incident that appeared about halfway through the lesson.

### What Happened

- Student A – a vocal student who had shown participatory enthusiasm from the start of the lesson by raising their hand a number of times had once again, raised their hand.
- The teacher acknowledges Student A and they ask the teacher a question about the task presented and explained by the teacher.
- The teacher asks the student ‘What is the answer to your question?’ (might be partially paraphrased)
- Student answers and is correct – the student understands what has to be done without the teacher telling them.
- The teacher positively reinforces this behaviour (bodily gestures) and addresses the class (with a humorous tone, as if it is something she has told them before) - ‘Why do you keep asking me questions – solve it for yourself.’

### Areas of possible exploration (What might be ‘under the hood’)

The teacher’s reaction to student A appears to be an attempt at encouraging the student to think for themselves and not to rely on the teacher too often.

I am interested in the kind of questions that encourage this behaviour from students and believe such questions might be pertinent to some of the curriculum’s 4 purposes, notably:

Healthy confident individuals who ‘Face and overcome challenge’, and ‘have the confidence to participate in performance’.

Under the hood: Student A might have been afraid to fail and wanted affirmation from the teacher. This is not entirely negative but could be interpreted as such if it happens often and it was clear in the class that other students also had this fear of getting something wrong.

Questions – how can teachers cultivate an environment where students are not afraid to get things wrong and try to think for themselves/believe in themselves/trust themselves? What questions can we ask students in order that they try to think for themselves?

How could I create an environment where learners are not afraid to be wrong and have the confidence to participate and hence learn in the art class? How could I promote self and peer-to-peer learning in the art class?

### Potential reading:

John Holt: How Children Fail

Blooms Taxonomy of questioning.

### Notes:

In this case, Student A might have been a typical student for this type of questioning (even if he knew the answer) and the teacher might also have assumed that he actually did know – hence why she further prompted him to think for himself by asking him ‘what is the answer to your question?’

I spoke to the teacher after class and she explained to me that she wants to cultivate an environment where students trust themselves and are not afraid to make mistakes although she also stressed that in a language class it is also important to move towards clarity and correctness. She wants the students to strive for accuracy but also not be afraid to get things wrong while learning.

Perhaps learning a new language puts stress on students’ confidence, as they are often trying to learn sentences and words which come quite easily to them in English but obviously, are less easy to grasp and learn in another language. This might cause anxiety about failing at something they can do well in their first language.

One method the teacher used to try to mitigate this ‘fear of failure’ issue was by appointing two students (strong ability students) as ‘lead learners’. These learners were responsible for attending to student questions instead of the teacher, encouraging peer-to-peer learning. The teacher explained that this is useful because sometimes learners are less afraid to fail when speaking directly to their peers and some do not want to be ‘wrong’ or appear that they didn’t understand something or need help in front of the teacher but are more comfortable asking a peer for help.

### Other related incidents included:

Student B raises his hand and says he finished the task but is ‘not 100% sure’ if he is correct. The teacher answered by asking the student ‘Do you think I am ever 100% sure whether what I think is correct?’ Student B reassuringly said ‘no’ – The teacher was trying to express that it is OK not to be 100% sure.

While monitoring students around the class I often heard the teacher say ‘trust yourself’ – implying that the learners were expressing a lack of confidence or were trying to rely on the teacher too much.

Record 2. 26<sup>th</sup> September. 2.00 p.m. Year 9. Geography.

### Where and When

Whole lesson.

### What Happened

At the beginning of the lesson, I noticed that a student was not fully engaging with the tasks set and was more occupied with his scissors, highlighter and a range of other objects. I decided to observe the student for the whole lesson to see how his behaviour evolved.

Scissors were not given out or relevant for the task at hand so it was evident that the scissors were his own (or taken from another class). Highlighters and glue sticks were given to students to complete the tasks.

Within the first activity – students were required to highlight mistakes in the text and try to amend them correctly. The student was disengaged and proceeded to clip the nib of the highlighter with his scissors and intermittently coloured the blades of his scissors with his highlighter, then rubbed the ink off with his fingers and repeated. When he thinks the teacher might catch him, the student hides the scissors, only to bring it out again when the teacher is less attentive.

At first I thought the learner might be disengaged because he is simply not interested or is challenged by the material – in the first few activities he seems to simply wait for the teacher to tell the whole class the answer, but it then seemed evident that he was engaging and getting answers correct (raises hand and answer a question) and notes down answers quickly in an activity/video comprehension.

Although there were some positives to his behaviour, he largely fiddled with things all lesson. (Scissors, highlighter, protractor and glue stick). The glue stick given out in class he put in his pocket and didn't return back to the teacher at the end when she told the class to.

### Areas of possible exploration (What might be 'under the hood')

Behaviour management?

Record 3. 27<sup>th</sup> September. 9.40 a.m. Year 7. Science.

### Where and When

In a year 7 Science lesson, I was interested in the teacher's behaviour management strategies.

### What Happened

- When noise level grew, the teacher would raise their voice and countdown – '5, 4, 3, 2, 1' – expecting silence by the end of the countdown. This worked well as the students grew increasingly quieter and became silent.

### Areas of possible exploration (What might be 'under the hood')

Behaviour management

Positive/negative reinforcement.

### Notes:

It was a busy environment and there was excitement from the students towards doing an experiment. Therefore there were several potential contributors for the rise in noise level – most notably perhaps, the fact they had to get out of their seats to collect equipment and set this up themselves in groups.

The countdown strategy was used about 3 times during the lesson, but the teacher also used other methods of behaviour management.

For example: Some students were not paying attention to the instructions given about setting up the experiment and these students were then not allowed to play a part in the experiment. The teacher described this as a 'warning' – repeated behaviour of this kind might lead to detention.

Due to the importance of health and safety, I can see why the students were not allowed to participate, however they were not given a task to do straight away – so sat there and often distracted some of the other students doing the experiment (a small group formed around one of the seated students, chatting). However when the seated student was given a task to do (reading a textbook? Answering textbook questions?) this behaviour stopped.