Learning Environment Reflection

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**Monday, February 11, 2013**

From my observations, I’ve noticed that students really like my mentor teacher and enjoy coming to her class. She easily jokes and talks with her students, building more than just an academic relationship with them. One of my goals is to imitate her in this way so that I can bond with the students I teach. For today, I picked four mini goals from the learning environment checklist. They are:

1. To use gestures to accentuate points,
2. To use interesting or unusual dimensions of the topic when teaching,
3. To sit or stand near the students while teaching, and
4. To give the students personalized praise for specific performance when they do well.

I picked these mini-goals to create a positive learning environment. My lesson for the day did not go near as well as I hoped and in turn, it flustered me. I had got the timing off for going over the topic and finished the planned material, much earlier than expected. While I tried to remember to focus on class environment as well as the concepts I was teaching, it was difficult. However, I did use gestures multiple times throughout the lesson for both periods accentuate important points of the lesson. In addition, I stood in front of the lab table at the front of room to be closer to them while teaching rather than behind the table to create a sort of barrier between us. When the students had some time to work on worksheets in groups, I made sure to walk to them when answering questions, crouching down to their level since they sat. In addition, I tried to give little anecdotes on the topics I was teaching; however, some of them, unfortunately, fell flat and did not stimulate interest as much as I hoped. When helping them while they were in groups, I made sure to praise them for finally coming up with the right answer as I questioned them. Because of how flustered I became, I was not able to achieve my goal as much in first period. By second period, I had adjusted some of my teaching and was able to focus more on the classroom environment.

From what happened in class today, I work on how I communicate my personal enthusiasm about the topic. Hopefully, this will help in stimulating learner interest.

**Tuesday, February 12, 2013**

Based on my reflection yesterday, I planned to work on communicating personal enthusiasm, which includes using eye contact and facial expression, using voice inflections to stress points of interest, having an energetic posture, and using gestures. In addition, I wanted to post an agenda for the day on the board (a suggestion from the reading) so as to give the students something to look forward to and to have a better idea of what to expect for the day since I had two fun activities planned today along with a short formative assessment. The agenda was supposed to also help me with keeping track of time.

I think I did much better today with communicating my own personal enthusiasm. It helped that I was really looking forward to the activities I planned. As a review, I split the class into two groups to play jeopardy. After, students worked in pairs to build a DNA molecule out of licorice, jelly beans, and toothpicks. I definitely used gestures to accentuate points throughout the jeopardy game. I also made sure to keep a confident smile on my face and to show my excitement about the activity. Because the students had such a great time playing the game, as evidenced by the desire to play again, and doing the activity, I think my enthusiasm helped and improved the lesson. It didn’t hurt that they got to eat candy as well. Due to unforeseen problems with preparing the activity materials, I was not able to post the agenda in time for first period. However, I made sure that I did it for second period. Because the main activity’s name was Have your DNA and Eat It Too, many of the students were kept wondering what the actual activity would be and it built a sense of anticipation among the class. I think that it will definitely be a good idea to continue posting an agenda for the day with attention-grabbing names for each activity.

Tomorrow, I plan to work on my eye contact. I have noticed that although it was one of my goals for today, I did not use it very well. It doesn’t help that I have problems with eye contact outside of the classroom, but I plan to improve since I think it will really help me with demonstrating warmth and friendliness as well as help achieve 100 percent compliance with students when giving a direction to them. I have noticed that the class enjoys having multiple side conversations while I am teaching and while other students are speaking.

**Wednesday, February 13, 2013**

My main goal for today was to work on my eye contact with the students. I also decided to use the students’ names in a warm and friendly way by greeting each student as they entered the classroom. This was mainly due to the fact that I needed to hold the door open since Ms. Lewis was out for the day and the substitute did not have a key. Therefore, the door remained locked; however, I thought the opportunity definitely presented itself to work on another aspect of the classroom’s learning environment. Most students responded positively to my greeting, although there were some who didn’t look or respond back. Not a problem though, since I’ll keep trying.

A film about genetics was planned for the day. Students were expected to complete a worksheet using information from the film. In both periods, there were multiple side conversations that took place, disrupting the movie and other students who were actually paying attention to it. I tried multiple times to make eye contact in hopes of conveying the need for them to quiet. It didn’t work and I then resorted to verbal directions. I had to issue them 2-3 times in both periods and each time there was never 100 percent compliance. I found it difficult between finding the balance to constantly ask the students to quiet and the consequence of further disrupting the film. Because eye contact seems to still be one of my biggest challenges, I plan to work on it again tomorrow.

**Thursday, February 14, 2013**

Based on the past couple of days, my goals for today were to focus on my eye contact and achieving 100 percent compliance. Because today was also a more lecture-based lesson, I wanted to work on my enthusiasm as well.

The plan for the day included finishing the movie and introducing DNA replication. I found that I at least improved upon my eye contact while teaching. Due to this, it seemed that there was much more participation as I tried to keep my back to the class while using the board the least amount as possible. In addition, I made small steps toward achieving 100 percent of the students following a direction. When transitioning from the film to the introduction of DNA replication, I asked for everyone’s attention and to bring their eyes to me. I waited for complete silence before continuing with the lesson. Unfortunately, I did not focus on if everyone had put their eyes on me, so I am still working on this goal. This process was the same for both periods.

Planned changes for next time include measuring 100 percent compliance by what I actually ask them to do rather than if the whole class is silent.