
**STEM & Writing Annual Partnership
Classroom Observation Form**

STEM Partner's Name: Magdalena Sorger
Course observed: English 101
Date of observation: September 16, 2014
Time of class: 10:15-11:05, 11:20-12:10, 1:30-2:20
Observed by: Matt Porter

Comments on Teaching

1. Planning and start of session

Introduction of self and material / Clarity of learning outcomes / Coping with any unexpected occurrences, e.g. latecomers, ornery equipment.

Magdalena was very well prepared and well organized, and this helped her to begin her lesson very quickly. As a result, the class began very well, with Magdalena quickly introducing herself and getting students started on the "WTF" activity within the first two minutes of the class period. She wasted no time in explaining the activity, dividing students into groups, and making clear their roles. As students began the WTF activity, she observed them closely, offering advice and assistance when necessary. When she realized that one student already knew that the WTF object was an aspirator, she quickly pulled him aside so that the rest of the group could continue to work. She also noticed another student (accidentally) mishandling the aspirator and showed her how to handle it properly. Throughout this opening activity, Magdalena paid close attention to students' progress, mindful that the class needed to move quickly. The moment students completed the activity, she began asking the groups to report on their attempts to identify the mystery object. She listened carefully to the groups, clarifying their responses and even joking with them. The combination of Magdalena's preparation, efforts to facilitate the students' work, and ease when leading the discussion served to make this a great opening to her presentation.

2. Presentation

Structure / Pacing / Organization of content / Enthusiasm for subject matter / Clarity of presentation / Emphasis of key points / Tone, volume, clarity of speech / Appropriateness for ENG101 audience.

Magdalena designed her presentation to cover three main topics: her work as a scientist, the role of writing in science, and her writing process. These topics are ideal for an English 101 course because they address the broad topic of science writing while focusing specifically on the writing done by a single scientist. As I'd hoped, students were jolted by this presentation. They had not

fully appreciated how much scientists must write to be successful—and this was illustrated, vividly, by their surprise at Magdalena’s description of her own writing and writing process. Due to her prior experience delivering presentations and her work as a teacher, Magdalena was able to devise a well-crafted and ambitious lesson. She provided students with good information and specific details while moving quickly through her presentation. Though the pace was quick, students had no problem following the discussion. This was made even easier by Magdalena’s expert use of PowerPoint.

3. Student participation

Attention and interest / Question and answer technique / Class management (appropriate level of control and authority) / Awareness of individual student needs / Student-teacher rapport (to the extent this can be established with a guest lecturer)

Magdalena is an excellent and compelling speaker, and because of this, she had no trouble keeping students’ attention. My students were very interested in her presentation. This was due in part to the subject matter, of course. But Magdalena also sought to keep students in mind as she constructed her presentation. She focused on topics that students were interested in, and she made sure to include details and asides that kept students captivated. From the ant videos to the photos of Vienna’s natural history museum to her story about creating multiple drafts of an important proposal, Magdalena provided the kinds of specific, concrete details that keep audiences interested. In addition, she spoke loudly and clearly. Magdalena also paid attention to the students. When students had questions, she was quick to notice and give them an opportunity to ask. She listened patiently and took time to provide a clear and thorough answer.

Students clearly liked Magdalena and enjoyed her presentation. In our conversations after class, they made clear that they found the presentation interesting and helpful. They also found her narrative compelling.

4. Methods and approaches

Choice/variety of teaching methods / Use and design of instructional materials (board, technology, hand-outs etc.) / Use of appropriate reinforcement / Examples and analogies

Magdalena’s lesson relied primarily on lecture, though she employed several other teaching methods as well, including group work, discussion, and Q&A. Each piece of her presentation was well-designed and well-delivered. The class began with an ice breaker, the WTF activity. She moved quickly to divide the students into groups and get them focused on their task. As students worked to describe the mystery object, she visited each group in order to gauge their progress and facilitate the discussion. Her efforts helped to ensure the students worked quickly and stayed on task. Magdalena then turned to the lesson’s primary instructional mode: lecture. Her lecture was fast-paced, interesting, and informative, combining her personal narrative with excellent information about the role of writing in biological sciences and her own research and writing. To illustrate her lecture, she relied on a PowerPoint presentation, which proved to be one of the most compelling aspects of her lecture. Rather than the typical bullet points and text, her PowerPoint relied primarily on images, short videos, and screenshots. For example, students got to see videos of trap jaw ants and a screenshot of the folder which houses all of the drafts of Magdalena’s funding proposal. These images and videos were chosen carefully, in some cases providing interesting

illustration and in others, essential evidence. Regardless, it was clear that students enjoyed being able to see the things that Magdalena discussed.

5. Big Picture

Were the learning outcomes achieved?

Yes! In our initial discussions, Magdalena and I focused on three key lessons. First, Magdalena needed to focus the discussion on herself and her work as a scientist. Her story is compelling, and I wanted students to understand—and become inspired by—her combination of passion, curiosity, and dedication. I also wanted them to be able to see a scientist at work. All of this laid the foundation for the second lesson: the role of writing in the biological sciences. Both Magdalena and I wanted to ensure that students understand that to be successful, a scientist must be able to write clearly and effectively. In her presentation, she addressed this issue directly, by pointing out the role of writing in securing funding and by asking student to brainstorm a list of different types of science writing (and the different audiences that scientists must write for). This set the stage for the third lesson: Magdalena’s own writing, as well as her writing process. To achieve, this Magdalena showed students examples of her writing and described her three-part writing process. This part of the lesson also featured the screenshot I described in the previous paragraph: the file folder containing nearly twenty drafts of her funding proposal. Students clearly understood that they were receiving good instruction and helpful advice from someone whose credibility was very strong.

6. Aspects to improve

Comment in terms of both teaching style and content:

I have no advice to give. Magdalena created a great lesson and delivered it well. My students and I were impressed.

Signed by observer: Matt Porter

Date: November 25, 2014