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German American Society Saturday School

Upon entering the German American Society, I was somewhat disoriented, not knowing what to expect. I entered a small building on the outside of the German American Society where several students were entering and getting ready for their two and half hour session of German immersion. I asked the first adult that I saw if they knew where _____ had a classroom. A friendly woman directed me to a basement room where she said that _____ would be leading "Chor" practice. It was a room filled with chairs, three or four adults in the audience as a group of 6 children (ages 5-12) danced and sang in a circle. _____ r lead them from the sidelines. It was a very informal session of singing. _____ a noticed me and asked about my presence. I introduced myself as the PSU student that was coming to observe the school system and she welcomed me warmly. "Chor" lasted about ten more minutes and then _____ lead me to her office where I had a brief interview with her before she set me free to explore any of the fourteen classrooms in the school.

_____ gave me a brief history of the school. The German American Society Saturday School started about seven years ago in the classrooms of Portland State University. The teachers had to haul their curriculum and teaching materials every Saturday and teach what they could in the campus setting downtown. After three years at Portland State University, the German American Society purchased their current location at 79th and Division in a former nursing home. Ever since, the Saturday school has had a stronger foundation for teaching and has grown significantly.

Throughout our conversation, we were briefly interrupted by several parents with minor issues, teachers with questions, and an occasional person peaking their friendly face in to say, "hallo". _____ and I had our interview in German, but often with the interruptions of a parent, who was usually a native German speaker, would speak English with _____ and the Saturday school's goal is to continue speaking in German to continue the full effect of the language immersion simulation. She said that most native speakers instinctly assume that the "American" wants to speak English, but she continues to speak in German.

_____ gave a couple of examples where she sees English as necessary in the classroom setting. The only time that she feels that English be used in when needing to discipline a student after speaking with them once. She offers a form of disappointment to the student if she needs to change out of the immersion simulation, by having to revert to English. The other place that she felt that English was necessary was when a student did not understand at all, after several tries explaining something in German. She wants the students to try to understand German in context, without the help of English, but when nothing is working, English is the last resort.

_____ prefers non-native German speakers...

After our brief interview, she set me loose to enter any classroom that I wanted to explore what the teachers and students are doing. I decided to start in the bottom floor where the youngest students have "Spielgruppe" for ages 2 1/2 - 4.

I entered the small room of two teachers and 5 children. They were standing in a circle getting ready to sing. I briefly introduced myself and my project and they continued to play. They started jumping up and down and singing, "Wir haben Hunger,

Hunger, Hunger” hoping that the child that was playing and hiding out underneath the table would come out to play and sing. After the song was sung three times, they all started their snacktime. Although I was only in there for a couple of minutes, I could see that the children were excited to play and sing in another language. They spoke to each other in English, but the teachers remained speaking in German. The children understood the teachers, which of course was the the first step to language learning: understanding.

Next I moved onto the 2nd grade classroom on the second floor of the building. As I entered the room, again I introduced myself and all the children greeted me. One main teacher focussed on the lesson as the teacher’s assistant helped the table full of boys acting a bit off task. The teacher was showing pictures of animals and letting the children find the correct word to fit to the animal. She started to incorporate sounds for the animals, but then realized that she herself didn’t know the sound that a “Waschbär” would make. A little girl was very enthusiastic and it seemed that she was a native speaker trying to help a couple of the other little girls with their “r” pronunciation. After they all finished their animal identification it was time to sing. The teacher’s assistant brought out his guitar and he gave the children two choices of songs, the children chose “Eisgekühlte Coca-Cola.” I was excited to hear this song, mostly because I had not heard it since I lived in Germany. I sang along as the song got faster each time that it was sung. After the song was over, I moved onto the next classroom.

1st grade-Fliege

Bibliothek- Frau

8th grade-Gedicht April (elfchen 12341)

10th grade-Worauf, Woran, worüber
darauf, daran, darüber

Name spiel einer Berühmten

10th-adult-simple past literacy

hatte gesehen

habe geform

gingen

precessor, sudden

0814-3

Independent Study
Classroom Observation
William Fischer
Spring 2009

Paper 3:
Portland Community College Community German Conversation II

I travelled out to Beaverton to the Portland Community College Capital Center Campus, where I met up with _____ in her classroom. I arrived a twenty minutes early and waited outside her classroom, where she was teaching German Conversation I. She saw me threw the door window and came running out excited that I was there. She welcomed me in and introduced me to the class of about 23 adults. _____ had me explain in German who I was and what my goal was in observing the classroom and I made sure to speak slowly, so they could get the idea of what I was talking about. Although it was the last ten minutes of this class, I was still able to see several exciting things.

_____ was explaining singular possessive adjectives without speaking in English. She talked about "deiner" chair, "meine" hair, "sein" book, or "ihr" (her) paper. Most students had a squinty nod of understanding, while a couple of students were lost and spoke up. She was very patient and continued on with examples. She ran over to me quickly to pass me some of the student work to read their stories. _____ wanted me to see the level at which the students were at. The stories were brief and were about their families, some were more advanced than others and some tried writing more than their vocabulary capability.

When I read one of the stories as trying to be more advanced than they were, a light came on for me about language learning. I had never quite understood until that moment *why* language learning had always seemed so positively silly, fun, and childish. It is necessary to hold the language ability to a children's level, because once a student goes on to try complex grammar and complex vocabulary, frustration and mistakes come more frequently. I could suddenly see the importance of keeping

lower level language-learning levels in elementary concepts to build a strong foundation.

After I read the stories, the class was just wrapping up and the students were receiving their next homework. Their assignment was to read a story and draw a picture of the things that they see. As _____ was walking along the rows passing stacks of the assigned work, she had each student say, "ich nehme fünf, ich gebe vier" and then the next student would say, "ich nehme vier, ich gebe drei". I was impressed with this simple exercise to get the students to speak and practice their numbers. The students left and the next class, German Conversation II trickled in.

German Conversation II was quite a bit smaller, about nine students. _____ introduced me to the class and I told my story again of why I was there to observe and participate. _____ had me start with the "check-in", explaining how I was doing and how my day was. Each student then went around the room and said how they were feeling. I really appreciate this kind of teaching. It connects and grounds the students to be aware how they are doing and to remind them that they are real people, not just a student. One student had a light cold and _____ spent a couple of minutes explaining the different vocabulary for sicknesses: "Grippe" and "Erkältung" and "Schnupfen". She took a current issue and applied it to her teaching _____ then handed back the homework assignments from last week. She had assigned an empty Dilbert comic for the students to fill out what they thought the story should have been. She showed me a couple of funny ones.

Then the students moved onto reading their answers aloud for this week's homework assignment, which was the proper use of accusative, dative, and two-way prepositions. She corrected students on the spot if needed after each student read their piece. All of the students had dictionaries next to them, ready to look up the next word. One woman was constantly opening her dictionary. After the students read their homework, _____ passed around the exercise to be worked through together in class.

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The class read a story aloud, each student reading four-five sentences. The story was about a lion that couldn't write. The lion wanted to write a love note to a girl lion, but he couldn't, so the story continues on to be about his adventure trying to find some other animal to write a note for him. He has a monkey write one, but his letter for him is about climbing trees and eating bananas, so the lion denies his letter. Then he meets a hippopotamus and he writes about swimming, and he denies his letter. Then he meets a dung beetle and he writes about eating dung and he stinks up the letter, so naturally the lion denies him too. He meets two other animals and he denies them as well. Finally, the lion meets up with the lioness without a letter and they fall in love anyway. The story uses simple past and has plenty of repetition to help the student to understand what is happening.

She reviewed the events of the story on the board and asked questions about each animal and why the lion wouldn't want to get a letter from a monkey, dung beetle, or any other animal. She helped the students to analyze the story. Following the analysis, she spoke briefly in English to explain why it was important to read this particular story. She wanted the students to know that their pronunciation would benefit from reading this story aloud and it uses examples of the simple past. She did not want to give a lesson on simple past, but she wanted the students to become familiar with it. She assigned homework to write five questions about the story. Following that she had everyone do a checkout in English about how they were developing and how they were feeling about their language learning experience. Everyone seemed to be relieved to speak English for a moment and all students were very receptive and excited by how much they had learned with her since September.

After the checkout, she erased the board and reviewed some of the things that she had written. It gave her one more chance to repeat. As a closing, she had everyone sing the "Hampelman" song. The students seemed to dread the idea of singing a little, but once they started, they were enjoying themselves. She stayed happy and excited the entire time. She explained the best part of the "Hampelman"

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was the conjugation practice that the student gets to do in just singing the song. "Ich bin ein kleiner Hampelman. Ich tanze, wie ich will...du bist ein kleiner Hampelmann, du tanzt...du willst,...er ist,...er tanzt, er will, ...wir sind, wir tanzen, wir wollen." I thanked the class for letting me see what they were learning and by that time, it was almost 9:15pm.

I spoke briefly with [redacted] about how she likes teaching these classes at Portland Community College. She says that she thoroughly enjoys them, but because they are community education classes, the pay is very little and she does not get paid for course planning. The students did not pull out a book at any point, but they are assigned *Schaum's Outline of German Grammar*, which I must assume is for home reference. All of the homework assignments that [redacted] assigned were made of handouts and copies that she made. All in all, observing [redacted] was very inspirational and I found some insight into methods in teaching German.