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2.18.16

Teaching and Learning III

Dr. Jeranyama

Rounds Reflection: American Literature – Jennifer Manglass

Ms. Manglass teaches English at UPCS and held her rounds towards the end of a discussion-based class where students were work-shopping their short stories or poems. The class was split up into two groups and the observers split themselves up between the two groups. Students were given a worksheet to help them with commenting and giving feedback. It was the second to last in a series of classes to allow students to volunteer and share their work with each other.

In the group I was observing, a student named Jocelyn was starting off the discussion by sharing her short story that she had written on the acceptance of death. The discussing that followed was very interesting. One thing that we all noticed was that all students contributed in some way to the discussion. That definitely showed that the format of the lesson and the checklist provided to them helped. Though I didn’t see much of the other discussion, I could tell that people we really enjoying themselves and getting into the discussion. In the post-round, Ms. Manglass told us it was more difficult to keep the other group on task.

I thought it was a good idea to split the class into two groups; it balances the amount of people able to share their stories and gives plenty of opportunity for people to give feedback. People were also taking a lot of notes throughout the discussion. I really liked the first round overall; it seemed an exemplar of what should happen in this format. I noticed that the students who were presenting did not prepare copies for the other students. They ended up sharing in some cases, but there were still not enough.

In the second discussion, people were not as engaged and it seemed like the stark opposite. There were the same people talking from before but it was almost exclusively those four people. Other people were still taking notes though and the conversation was interesting. People were debating over the effectiveness of the title and also what sorts of details were missing in the story’s arc. Other things I noticed people mentioning were the beginning, middle and end of the piece. It helped provide some context for where the comment was being directed.

A lot of the longer conversations were focused on the setting, visualization, and title. People had some pretty strong opinions about this, and it seemed like the checklist provided by Ms. Manglass gave reason for talking about these aspects. I did see people talking about the first item on the checklist, “I have a powerful/intriguing opening line”, it occurred in both discussions. The second story in particular seemed to be homage to students who are unable to motivate themselves to complete school despite a crushing number of absences. It’s been a popular topic of discussion given events from this year. The students in the discussion made the connection right away and were able to give feedback on tone and voice of the author.

Discussion-based classes are not my forte; I would like an opportunity to use them but I find it difficult to incorporate into my planning. I need a lot more practice on framing essential and generative questions for discussion. Similarly, facilitating the discussion itself needs careful planning too so that the discussion keeps moving. I have gotten better at wait time for students and definitely see the relevance in my practice. I liked how students were required and largely followed the etiquette of the lesson. They were respectful of not using the author’s name and using good questions to communicate. It showed me one way of promoting a safe classroom environment.