

Scott Fenton
Observation Report: Rachel
Wednesday, October 29, 2014

Rachel greeted the students that had arrived early upon entering the classroom and engaged in pre-class conversations with student(s) who had questions about upcoming assignments. These students seemed quite comfortable in this classroom environment and, relaxing in their seats before attendance was taken, asked each other what was due for the day and whether Rachel held her office hours today. No, another student responded, I met with her *yesterday*.

Rachel maintained her friendly but serious teaching persona with remarkable consistency through the entire class. This is a line that Rachel straddles so well—her students find her approachable but trust and respect her as the authority in this sphere. She subtly demonstrated her authority by delegating tasks to students—for example, she asked a student to hand out the sample essay she intended to go over with the class. She placed her copy of the sample essay on her document camera and asked students to volunteer to read paragraphs, “so we’re at the same starting point.” Students volunteered readily! And Rachel thanked each volunteer for reading.

The class worked through each paragraph of this sample essay (Beatrix Kiddo!), annotating it with Says/Does in the margins, and Rachel pointed out specific strengths and weaknesses that her students could either use as a model or avoid. Next, Rachel divided her students into five groups to have them share their Essay 2 intros and receive feedback. Rachel wrote a template for an Essay 2 introduction on the blackboard and walked around the classroom offering support to groups who needed it. One female student seemed particularly stressed, but she noted, “I did so good on my first Microtheme.”

There was occasional murmuring in the back of the classroom. There seems to be a subset of students who only tune in when it’s “relevant” to them and their concerns—whatever that means. A student to my right texted frequently throughout the class period, wielding his iPhone shamelessly. A male student sitting in front of me spent the class period perusing the entire Facebook friends list of a girl he didn’t seem to know very well (based on the *low* number of mutual friends).

Freshmen are a rowdy bunch, but Rachel manages her classroom remarkably well. She ended the class period by asking, “Are we feeling better about what’s expected for Essay 2?” And the students did indeed seem to feel better. One thing I noticed was that doing Says/Does for every paragraph in the sample seemed to tire the students out quickly—Rachel could consider doing the first half as a whole class and the second half in groups if she does a similar exercise in the future.