

Sample Classroom Observation Memo

TO: Communication Discipline Colleagues
FROM: Kelly Cain, Peer Review Committee Member
CC: Mary Jones, Instructor of Communication
DATE: June 1, 2017

Instructor Observed: Mary Jones
Discipline/Number/Section: COM 114W-SP110
Scheduled Time: 9-12:25 p.m.
Location: S111
Date of Observation: May 30, 2017
Time of Observation: 9-10:25 a.m.

On Tuesday, May 30, 2017, I had the privilege of observing Mary Jones in her Interpersonal Communications course (COM 114W), which meets in S-111 from May 9 through June 25 on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 12:25 p.m. This three-credit course is an introduction to communication theories. The course is designed to apply communication principles involved in initiating, developing and maintaining a relationship.

First, I am going to outline what I observed in the classroom. Second, I'm going to detail six teaching topics that were applicable to this visit. Next, I will offer Mary suggestions. Finally, I will apply this visit to my classroom.

OBSERVATION

I arrived to the classroom about 8:45 a.m. The classroom was locked, and students were in the hallway. No one was talking. Most were engaged in either texting or some other activity on their personal cell phone. Mary arrived at 8:52 a.m., opened the classroom, set up her area at the front of the classroom, and then went to her office to retrieve a few things. She came back to the classroom about 8:58 a.m. and wrote the day's agenda on the board.

Today – Chapter 9

Exam #1 back to you

Thurs – Chapters 10 & 6

Right at 9 a.m, Mary instructed the students to get in to the same groups they were in the previous class session—black, blue, green, or red. She gave verbal instruction and displayed the instructions on the overhead display too.

Two more students arrived at 9:01. She acknowledged them and told them to get in their colored groups. Mary started reviewing the green group students' notes. I believe Mary was checking to see if the work was completed and if the work would count toward their participation grade.

One more student arrived at 9:02. She called "James" by name. He asked what to do, and she replied he should get in his colored group. 9:05 "Jessica" arrived; Mary called her by name and gave her instruction. One more student arrived, and Mary did not acknowledge him.

By 9:06 all students were definitely on task. Mary answered questions very matter-of-fact and moved at a quick pace from one group to the next. Her manner was very business-like. The classroom was very quiet although most everyone was participating. Mary gave class further direction after one student asked a question. One student was doing nothing. She asked him to participate. He didn't. She then asked him to move his chair to be more part of the group. He complied. At this point, Mary had completed looking at all of the students' notes within the four groups.

By 9:09 two more students arrived, and Mary directed them what to do. When Mary reviewed the work of one of those that arrived late, "Matt" was called by name. He said something funny, and Mary smiled. By 9:12 the classroom started to become louder, and all students were very much on task. One group asked a question, so Mary walked over to that group to answer the question. Mary asked the groups how they were doing and gave verbal encouragement. At this point, Mary had me introduce myself. She discussed what today's agenda was, and she also talked about what the class would be doing on Thursday. Mary explained why they were doing the chapters out-of-order.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Activity. At 9:20 we moved to the galleria for a group activity. Mary directed students into groups and even told them where to stand. There were three timed activities. Each activity was timed at 1 minute, 15 seconds.

First, students were asked to form a small circle, put their backs to each other, and carry on a conversation about what they did over the Memorial Day weekend. Students could not see each other but were engaged and took turns talking.

Next, students were asked to turn inward to face each other and talk about their favorite vacation. Students were very engaged. Mary walked around smiling and observing the students.

In the last activity, the students were asked to describe (using NO words) a place they would like to visit next. Students were told they could not use sign language, if they knew it, but could use any gestures they would like. She then said, "Go." At one point, she joked: "Don't look at me. Look at each other."

Post Activity Discussion. After the exercises, Mary directed the students to discuss (in their small group, right there in the galleria) the advantages and disadvantages of each exercise. She walked around ensuring that each group was on task.

Afterward, as a group (right there with everyone still standing in the galleria), Mary led a discussion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of each. She made great eye contact, used hand gestures, and reinforced their answers. She smiled and nodded a lot and also repeated what the students said so that everyone could hear the answers.

Mary then summarized why she had the students complete this activity. She explained, "In Chapter 12 we are going to talk about this _____." She asked, "How many of you think _____?" "Why?" Mary used lots of hand gestures and smiled a lot. She called students by name. She even asked the question, "How does this happen in real life?"

Mary told the class, "Thank you for your participation in our field trip." Students laughed, and we were then all directed back to the classroom (time 9:50 a.m.). Students were all chatting, smiling, and seemed very energetic.

LECTURE

Mary's classroom is set up with the students' desks in a horseshoe shape with her desk being at the opening of the "U." Mary sat in a chair behind her desk with notes in front of her.

I made the following notes during Mary's lecture:

- Uses many hand gestures.
- Uses voice inflection ↑ and ↓
- Repeats key terms and allows time for them to write down.
- "Matt, You may want to move your chair so you can use your book and notebook."
- Uses "Right?" and "Does everybody understand that?" To check for understanding
- "This is what's coming up in the next chapter."
- "This next part is not in the book, so you'll want to take notes here."

I left the class at about 10:25 a.m.

EVALUATION

Enthusiasm. Mary speaks expressively. She uses great variety in moving her pitch and volume. She moved about the room when evaluating the students' work but remained seated while lecturing. Mary uses her hands and arms when giving instruction and while speaking. Mary used humor during the group activity in the Galleria.

Clarity. Mary did a great job using concrete examples related to real-life. She pointed out practical applications and stressed important points. She repeated key terms and paused, allowing the students time to take notes—even encouraging one to do so!

Interaction. Mary almost always called each student by name. She encouraged students to ask questions and often checked for understanding.

Rapport. During the activity in the Galleria, Mary was very friendly and moved from group to group during each of the timed activities. She smiled and praised them for what they were doing. During the lecture, she also smiled and interacted with the students—rather than just providing information.

Organization. Mary did put the day's outline on the board and appeared very organized with notes, book, etc. It appeared as though she put time into organizing the activity in the Galleria—there were no lags in time, and each minute was filled with a task.

Class time. I was very impressed that there was exactly 15 minutes for the small group work at the beginning. There was exactly 30 minutes allotted for the activity in the Galleria. There was an incredible amount of material covered within only 45 minutes of class time!

SUGGESTIONS

Mary is an amazing instructor. It was difficult to come up with any suggestions, but I was asked to really stretch and try to find a few ideas to share with Mary.

Class opening. I am wondering if it would be effective to take two or three minutes to have a greeting before getting into the task at hand. Mary opened the class by simply telling the students to get into their group and start working. This is probably the style of many professors; it's just something that I think could have changed the atmosphere.

I would suggest opening the class with a greeting and asking the class if anyone did anything fun over the holiday weekend which may allow a warm up of the climate of the classroom. Additionally, it would have allowed Mary to give directions about 9:05, and there would not

have been the interruptions of students arriving late—where she had to repeat instructions to each person that entered the room.

On the other hand, the very business-like approach signaled to the students that everyone needed to get to work, and the class time was to be used on-task. This is something that I greatly admire. All students that were present were working by 9:01!

Group arrangement. I didn't have time to speak with Mary that morning, but I am wondering the purpose of using the "color" groups. I would imagine that Mary does use a lot of group work, and maybe there are various groups that the students belong to. If she doesn't do so, it may be interesting to "shake" the groups up and offer them to begin each class session with a different group.

Lecture. When Mary began her lecture, she sat at the head of the U-shape behind one of the desks. I would suggest that standing or even sitting on a table would allow her a different vantage point. I think this works OK in the U-shape classroom, but it would not have been effective in a typical classroom.