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Teacher Assistant - Advanced English: Presentation

## **General Observations**

[FN 1] The fieldwork I was set in was Seoul National University, South Korea. I am a teacher assistant for an Advanced English Presentation class in the business division. Many students were set on improving their marketing skills, conference skills, and overall international skills gave that many students wanted to work globally. At the beginning of the fieldwork, students were set to give an overview of what they wanted to do and what they wanted to work on throughout the course. Many students said they wanted to work in marketing or raise their own business. This class seemed to be a good fit for their goals as one of the upcoming projects was to pitch a new, original project and sell it to the class.

[Update] To get ready for an upcoming project, students were set to come into class with a prepared resume and questions that they believe the interviewer would ask. This would be a way to assess where students were at when it came to the interviewing process. It would give a different perspective of their performance without the added pressure of the performance being harshly graded (OC). Students were set to get in groups of two to four students, making the class have six groups in total. The desks were moved so students could face each other while having enough space from each other to properly discuss without interruption. This section of the class was especially helpful for students who had never gone through the interview process. As we are getting ready for the midterm performance review presentation, we want to prepare the students as much as possible.

## **Focused Observations**

In the second week of working with the students, I was set to proctor four groups. Although I did not end up proctoring students on the first day of the second week, I gained insight into how students performed and what they needed in terms of preparation for upcoming assignments. Most of them were unprepared and the in-class activity was extended to two days. Although the professor gave a syllabus at the beginning of the year, I believe this could have been due to the lack of announcements for upcoming homework assignments (OC). This was quickly mediated by the professor and me by giving a written statement on the online website and by giving an announcement right before class ended.

On the first day of this in-class activity, due to students being rather quiet during the activity, it came to our attention that students were not prepared. The professor and I discussed this quickly and concluded that perhaps we should move the activity to another date. This activity was supposed to be graded on preparation, performance, and content. However, it came to my attention that students may not have been aware of the upcoming activity as the syllabus was a bit confusing on the timelines (OC). After coming to this conclusion, the professor asked “Can you guys raise your hands if you were not prepared for this assignment?” Due to his nature as a well-mannered British man, he followed up with “I apologize as I realize the syllabus might have been a bit confusing.”

This is a habit I noticed he did in my previous class (OC). In my previous class with him, I also learned about cultural differences between America, South Korea, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, and more; and what we learned about was the levels of the context of each country. Low context is when meaning is stated bluntly and respect for people of higher status or level is treated with less gravity. High context, on the other hand, is when meanings are more implied than said and respect for people of higher status is shown with the utmost importance. This does not mean that people in low-context cultures do not value their higher-ups, but they are treated as more of an equal. In the United Kingdom, they were more high context than America and lower context than South Korea. Although the context is different in each country, what he means to say is: “You guys didn’t properly read the syllabus, but I am giving you guys some slack.” The students will learn this unit after their midterm performance review feedback—which will be quite eye-opening for them (OC).

Witnessing most of the students raising their hands brought light to what the students needed and what actions the professor needed to take. One of the students even mentioned, “There are no clear dates on the syllabus.” Although there was a clear timeline of what would happen in each class, the students were still confused. It was easy to understand that students either needed a clear announcement right after each class or they needed a syllabus that explicitly states what is expected in the next class along with the dates and due date times.

After helping students find jobs for their respective career goals and helping them edit their resumes, I also noticed that many of them did not have extracurricular activities outside of their high school. Their extracurriculars mostly surrounded their placements in class, physical education, projects, and their part in the school council or club activities.

[FN 1] Although the Korean students are rather advanced in English, they were not advanced in Business or other extracurricular activities as most students in Korea were not trained to have jobs before college. Korean students, since elementary, are solely focused on getting into the right middle school, high school, and college as they are judged by their grades and exam scores for each school level. This type of culture is different for international students as college is typically their main concern when it comes to acceptance (OC).

International students, namely Americans, had more experience in this field due to starting in high school in extracurriculars. This means taking part in volunteer work, summer programs, and internships. A Russian student also stood out in this particular issue since he was a graduate student and already had experience in a programming internship. Students from Europe or Hong Kong generally had a mix of the same experiences as Koreans and Americans. [FN 1 - End]

The professor foresaw this cultural aspect as he has had ten years of experience with Korean university students. He gave them a few templates and phrases so students could make the most out of their high school experiences, and even gave them phrases they could use for group projects as well. The phrases were along the lines of: “I adapted to issues in the group and revitalized...”, “I led the team to meet deadlines...”, and “I am punctual and reliable as I resourced the team...”

One thing that the professor advised the students was that the general skills they needed to focus on and keywords they needed to say were already in the general job description of their desired job.

In the next class, I will be proctoring the students and watching how well they have prepared with the many resources they have.

## **Reflections**

“Mind and Society” by Lev Vygotsky stood out to me during the class session. The text overall explains the ideas and debates of how learning and development form with each other. In Thorndike’s perspective, “theoreticians in psychology and education believe that every particular response acquisition directly enhances overall ability in equal measure.” Learning one thing well would allow successful learning in an unrelated subject. I believe this applied well to this particular class session. Students were not well-informed in the syllabus and thus did not read the few helpful templates and phrases they could use to create a stronger resume. With the added knowledge of strong vocabulary, they became literate in creating a strong resume and job interview responses.

For future circumstances, understanding cultural differences will help them understand others better of different backgrounds. For example, today the professor said it was alright that they didn’t understand the syllabus, entirely missing what he meant. Being able to read between the lines with the added knowledge of low-and-high context cultures will help them understand not only the professor but also their future business partners.