Observation 2 – 05/08/2004 Grade 5.2 (9:10 – 9:45).

When I arrived at the class there were 5 children sitting outside, writing out lines because they had apparently misbehaved. The line they had to write out was “I will learn to behave and be respectful”. The children outside were Jaylene (L1), Slade (L1), Karabo (L2), Dylan (L1) and Theko (L2), they believed that they had done nothing wrong and that the teacher was being unfair. (Dylan later that day smashed the cistern in the boys’ toilet). These children remained outside until the break.

There were 27 children inside the class. The desks were grouped so that the children could sit in groups of 4. At the time there were 2 groups of 2 children, 5 groups with 4 children and 1 group with 3 children making 27 in total. The groups appeared to be heterogeneous.

There were various English charts from Depicta on the back wall, explaining terms such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, conjunctions, parts of speech, and interjections. The other part of the back wall had a calendar, a display of proudly South African pictures - Mandela and the African Museum and the children’s artwork – paper folding and monsters. More artwork was on the side wall – African footprints and texture drawings.

Some of the children who know me from support classes got out of their seats very quietly and just came and said hello and went to sit down again quietly.

The whole class was doing the same activity. The teacher (T) was handing out cartoons that the children had previously done. I slipped in quietly and took a seat at the back. She gave instructions to the children to listen three times but the class did not stop making a noise. Then she said “has everyone written down the assessment criteria – what you are going to do is discuss it and write it down for each cartoon. (I must be honest I did not understand what they had to do at first).

She walked over to Hong Ming (L2) who was very uncooperative, had a very sulky look on his face and who argued with her – I could not hear what she was saying to him but he hit the desk with his fist, shook his head vigorously and then got up and fetched his book.

The assessment criteria table was written on the chalkboard, it said:

Assessment criteria for _________________ cartoon.
1. Direct speech
2. Spelling
3. Neatness
4. Layout
5. Pictures
6. Attraction

The noise level in the class was very high and not all the children were on task. *(I was quite astounded at the noise level from the point of view that it was not productive noise and at how badly some of the children were behaving and yet were getting away with it as if they were entitled to behave this way all the time.)* T walked around to some of the groups and re explained the activity to individual children a couple of times. The whole class was doing the same activity using different cartoons which were initially handed out by the teacher. Thereafter they had to choose another cartoon from the pile on a table in the middle of the classroom. They had to work with a partner and assess at least two cartoons each. Each child had to have their own assessments in their books – it had to be written down after discussion with their partner.

Even after the T had walked from group to group some children were still not on task – they were playing with paper, folding it into shapes and talking to each other and across groups. T eventually said “I don’t think making a noise was on of the assessment criteria” a couple of children ignored her and continued playing – Justin (L1) in particular – just as if she had not said anything. She then asked “how many children are on the second cartoon, hands up”, about 6 children put their hands up.

T walked across to Nkosinathi (L2) and explained the criteria to him by saying “a 1 means that it is not very good and a 2 means that it is a little bit good what do you think?” During this explanation another child had gone to her desk and was looking through the papers on her desk, she picked him out and sent him to get on with his work. She was then interrupted by Alex (L1) who complained that he did not agree with his partner Rebecca (L1) and the mark that she had awarded to a particular cartoon. She had given it a 4 and he wanted to give it a 3. The T said that they must come to an agreement. Alex (L1) said that Rebecca (L1) had given the cartoon a 4 because it was done by her friend. The T then changed the cartoon to be fair and gave them another one – Rebecca (L1) commented that the new cartoon was also done by a friend of hers and she would also give her a 4 so she changed the cartoon herself. By this time the T was no longer listening and had moved away.
Hong Ming (L2) has now settled down and is working quite amicably with Selekane (L2). Tyron (L1) is out of his desk showing Calvin (L1) the cartoon that he is supposed to be assessing. Calvin (L1) had got out of his seat to talk with Tyron (L1) and his partner Mbali (L2) says "can we do our work" to him – he reluctantly sits down again. (Very interesting to see that quite a few of the boys that come to support classes actually play around so much in class as if it's their right to do as they please.)

Thulane (L2) is helping Nkosinathi (L2) complete the activity at their desks. The children do not appear to be interested in this activity. There is a lot of playing - playing with a coloured bouncing ball on an elastic string at least two children doing this under their desks, looking at their watches, shouting across their groups, out of their seats walking around.

T has an altercation with Tyron (L1) he throw something at her she says "Am I playing a game with you" he laughs and says no and other children laugh as well. (Maybe he was showing off for my benefit as he has told me in support lessons that he doesn't like this teacher.)

Nkosinathi (L2) and Thulane (L2) are now walking around (perhaps they are finished). By now very few children are actually working, some are openly being disruptive and shouting – Justin (L1) and Calvin (L1) are both out of their seats playing - T says "What are you doing? Bring me your homework diaries" (obviously to give them a demerit) The class immediately quietens down quite a lot. T then asks which children are finished and tells them to open their books and let her see the work.

Then she says "Ok people" most children ignore her again as the noise level has risen again. The intercom comes on and asks for someone to be sent down to the office – the name of the child concerned was inaudible and nobody takes any notice of it. T says "Umm right hold up the cartoons" and asks for them to be collected and left on the table in the middle.

Then she says “take out your readers” picks out Theko (L2) (outside), comes back in and repeats take out your readers. One child asks me “am I writing a report on the class?” I reply “no I’m doing a project but not for the school for my university studies”. He says “oh” and goes back to scratching in his things for his reader.

T tells the class to open their readers on page 13, while keeping their English 2 books open – children don’t take much notice – so she says “right 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1.” The class is much quieter now. Alex (L1) shouts out I don’t have my book. T walks up to him and says “here’s your book – excuses, excuses – Timothy (L1) start reading” He starts on the wrong page. Problem was that there are two different editions of the book being used in the class one with a white type cover
and one with a pink cover. The book they are reading is Matilda by Roald Dahl. The place in the
one book is page 13 and in the other edition it is page 19. The T sorts out this confusion and
Timothy (L1) begins to read. T interrupts "No wait Alex (L1) you are being rude do you want to
join them outside? Timothy (L1) start reading!"

Some children don’t have books and are sharing. T finds the place for others. Timothy (L1) reads
fairly well then the T says “OK stop, Terrence (L1) and Cara (L1) read” only Terrence starts
reading – T says “ahhhhh Terrence (L1)and Cara (L2) read together (they are sharing a book)
They read about a page. The children sitting outside shout Mammm. T says “Rebecca (L1)
read” and goes outside. The children are fairly quiet during the reading. T rows with the children
outside and shouts “Thulane (L2) read” from outside. Some children start to talk and others say
shh. T back inside checks whether Nkosinathi (L2) has the right place and tells Thulane (L2) to
stop reading and Vickashnee (L1) to read. T is now with Hong Ming (L2) and follows on the line
for him with her finger, she tells him to sit up straight as he is lying on the desk.

T says “Stop - what does it mean to egg him on – hands up”. Alex (L1) has his hand up, T asks
him, he says “to annoy someone” the T says “like what you do to me when you don’t listen!” (I
don’t think this is the correct meaning isn’t it to encourage someone to continue doing something
stupid?) T says Danny (L1) read, he doesn’t start reading – T says “wake up some one show him
the place!” T walks around checks that Stella (L2) has the right place and tells Danny (L1) to stop
reading and Tyron (L1) to start reading. Tyron (L1) doesn’t have the place – T says “don’t tell him
Tyron (L1) stand up, Melissa (L2) read”. She read dealed for diddled and the class corrects her.
T says stop Chane (L1) read. She stumbles over a couple of words – tamper, maker and laddie
T corrects her. (The first child in the whole lesson that she has corrected) Then T says “stop ok
look at the top of page 22 and read the first word”. It took awhile for everybody to find the correct
place - I even helped a couple of children seated close to me to find the place. Again the problem
was the two different editions of the book which the T seemed to forget. Then she said
everybody read the first word of the chapter together, come on read it. The word was ‘Mummy’.
Eventually everybody read it. Then she said “skip 3 words read” Now some children couldn’t find
the place so she started reading the words aloud. Some children joined in with her. She said
“skip 3 read, faster” then she stopped reading and says next - not all the children are reading
some are just following along. Then she says stop. One child shouts out that it doesn’t make
sense to read like that (a good point) why are we doing it? The T replies “because some of our
eyes work slower and we need to practice, you get me”. (This is a very strange reason for doing
this but maybe it does have merit but she should have explained the reason beforehand).
The teacher tells one of the children to go and get the tuck and tells the rest to carry on reading
silently – no one listens. Then she says ok get your lunch.
Her last comment to me was that she makes Hong Ming (L2), Nkosinathi (L2) and Collen (L2) follow along with their fingers during reading lessons as she thinks it’s good for them.

(Reading over this observation and typing out the full notes gives the impression that this lesson was awful. It was but learning still appears to be happening in this class. I looked at the cartoons that they were assessing - these had been completed in other lessons and most of the children in the class had done one. On the surface they seemed to be fairly good, only Tyron had not written any words he had just done scribbles in the speech bubbles. This teacher was the third teacher this class has had this year and she will not be the last as she is only substituting for someone on maternity leave. Perhaps she was not feeling well at the time of my visit. Later on that day she was in trouble due to Dylan and the toilet episode – she did not come to school on Friday allegedly because she was sick.)