

OBSERVING AND TALKING WITH A TEACHER POST SEMINAR 2 ASSIGNMENT: TAKE TWO

Purposes

To practice—

- observing teaching with a non-evaluative stance;
- asking genuine questions grounded in observations;
- opening up a conversation that gets at the teacher’s thinking
- considering the benefits and challenges of this kind of observation and conversation

Preparation

1. Decide which teacher to observe. We recommend that you choose someone you regard as a good teacher, someone you would like to see in action and talk to about his/her teaching. Since your goal is to listen and learn about teaching and this teacher’s thinking, you should choose someone whose teaching you admire (or anticipate admiring).
2. Schedule a time to observe a full lesson.
3. Schedule a time to talk about the lesson you observed. We recommend that you give yourself some time to prepare for the conversation. In other words, try to avoid talking about the lesson right after the lesson.
4. In setting up the observation, tell the teacher that this is an assignment for MTEI, a professional development seminar, in order to practice observing a lesson and having a conversation about what you observed. Be sure to tell the teacher that you will be taking notes during the lesson to help you remember what went on and that these notes will be the basis for a conversation.

The Observation

1. Sit in a place where you have a good view of the teacher and students.
2. Do not participate in the lesson.
3. Take notes, concentrating on writing down what you see and hear (description); keep your questions and reactions separate.
4. You might want to note the time when the major activity of the lesson changes.

Time	What I see and hear (description)	Questions/reactions

Preparing for the Post-Observation Conversation

Review your observational notes, looking for things you’re genuinely interested in and curious about. Write down questions that you would like to discuss with the teacher. Note what you saw/heard that grounds this questions and explain why it matters to you. Use the template below to structure your planning.

Questions I am asking about the lesson	Observations that give rise to the questions	Why this matters to me

1. Look over your questions and decide which one(s) you want to ask the teacher.
2. Think about how you will open or introduce the conversation. (e.g. Thanks for letting me observe your teaching. I've been looking forward to talking with you about the lesson.) Try to avoid beginning with compliments; maintain a non-evaluative, inquiry stance.
3. Be sure to bring whatever notes or questions you need.
4. Decide whether you will take notes or audiotape the conversation so that you can write it up later.

The Post-Observation Conversation

1. Bring your plan, created above, and your curiosity to the conversation so that your manner conveys genuine interest in the teacher's thinking.
2. Bring a notepad and/or tape recorder. Explain to the teacher that you are doing this so you can write it up.
3. Practice attentive listening. Ask follow up questions to open up the conversation, clarify the teacher's ideas, probe the teacher's thinking. (Can you explain what you mean? What's an example? How did that make you feel? What were you thinking?)
4. Ending the conversation: Ask the teacher what the conversation was like for him/her. Share something that you learned from the conversation. Be sure to thank the teacher for his/her time.

Writing up the Conversation

Review your conversation with the teacher and bring written responses to the following questions to Seminar Three. Be specific and include examples to illustrate your answers. Please write up your responses in a form that can be shared with someone else.

1. Whom did you observe and why did you choose this teacher?
2. What was the lesson about? (brief description)
3. What question(s) did you ask? Why did you decide to go with these questions?
4. Which questions worked well? What's your hunch about why?
5. How did you use your observational record?
6. What did you learn about this teacher's thinking and practice?
7. What did you learn about observing teaching? Taking notes?
8. What did you learn about talking about teaching in a non-evaluative way?