

MTEI SEMINAR 4: OBSERVING AND TALKING WITH A TEACHER
POST SEMINAR 3 ASSIGNMENT

1. Whom did you observe and why did you choose this teacher?

I observed a relatively new teacher because she has expressed several times to me that she is interested in learning and open to suggestions, both of which are true. And I sincerely liked her and felt comfortable practicing this with her! In addition, her third grade class has been a challenging one this year, and I wanted to see more for myself what was going on.

2. What was the lesson about? (brief description)

It was a Gr. 3 Hebrew and they were learning portions of the Haggadah. In this class, she was trying to teach the students the song "Echad Mi Yodayah", at my request. This was a new piece of the curriculum for this grade, which becomes significant later.

3. What question(s) did you ask? Why did you decide to go with these questions?

- a. I wanted to use some of the prompts provided us by MTEI. I decided to use: "I notice that you did X ...can you tell me more about this?". The "x" in this case was how she was teaching the song- introducing some concepts, singing a few words, having the kids repeat it, going around to each table of children (3 tables), getting close up to them to have them participate, repeat after her, etc.
- b. I also asked her the q. "Was there a time in the lesson when you had to make a decision?" and when she said 'Yes' (I already had felt this) I asked her to describe that process- how she made the decision, what factors did she weigh, what was the trade-off, etc."

It was a difficult lesson that wasn't going so well, and she was working HARD to make it happen. I wanted to hear her thoughts about all of this and have her reflect on the lesson plan, as I too had been doing, since I had 'put her up to it'!

4. Which questions worked well? What's your hunch about why?

Both questions elicited a tremendous response, and that became the core of what we discussed the rest of the hour. I think they worked well because they zeroed in on what was going on in the class that day, and I knew she hadn't been satisfied with that lesson and so this simply opened up the conversation.

5. How did you use your observational record?

I reviewed it to look for patterns in my observations/ themes that had come up frequently, and also reviewed my comments/ questions in my sidebar. From there, it became clear to me what issues seemed the most prevalent and also which ones appealed to me the most to discuss with her.

6. What did you learn about this teacher's thinking and practice?

I learned **that** she had a lot of 'big picture' questions that we have never discussed, and which she IS interested in talking about, and because we haven't, she is operating in a philosophical vacuum, **which** is uncomfortable. This particular lesson raised other questions for her as well, including **what** should our "Jewish" goals be, are we teaching our students lessons without a context, **how** and why do we teach Pesach if the children aren't observing at home, etc. I learned that she **has** been struggling with these questions a lot but I was not aware of the extent and I felt remiss **that** we had never discussed these issues before throwing her into teaching. In terms of her **practice**, observing her reinforced what I feel I knew already- she tries many different methods **to** connect her lessons to her students and vice versa, and she needs some help organizing and communicating her lessons and giving clear directions.

7. Did you have a chance to practice supporting and challenging? What did you learn about that?

I feel like **my** most supportive statement was "You were working HARD during that class". I don't **know** if that is considered an evaluative statement, but she seemed to greatly welcome that comment, and I believe it validated the effort and energy she had been exerting. Her response was "I felt like an octopus" which opened up and deepened our conversation to a huge extent. It was a **fabulous** metaphor for how she was indeed handling everything and everyone!

I did ask **the** question "Would you have done anything differently?" which perhaps could have put **someone** on the defensive, but knew from our conversation that she would not react that way. So perhaps that is a 'challenging' question-not sure. It moved the discussion into new and very important **territory** that I don't think we would have gone into if it had not been asked.

8. What did you learn about observing teaching? Taking notes?

This time around, I was able to see exactly HOW challenging this group is and I came to understand better the children's behavior and complicated dynamics. It made me think, in hindsight, about how much more I should have been of help to this teacher, and others, and made me reflect on MY work as the principal.

Taking notes this time was easier, and my notes were a bit clearer and a bit more detailed.

9. What did you learn about talking about teaching in a non-evaluative way?

It was very helpful to reflect back on a particular lesson, in a non-evaluative way and with particular questions in mind, as it allowed for a very open, yet focused, discussion. That discussion actually led us both to re-evaluating that particular lesson and how it could have been done differently to be more effective. It also allowed us to have a mini-brainstorming session on creating effective lessons in general and revising our Pesach curriculum in particular. We BOTH learned and reflected in that discussion-so it was a 'two-way street' for sure!

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