

- **Whom did you observe and why did you choose this teacher?**

I chose to observe Lilli Shvartsmann, one of our newer teachers because she has that wonderful combination of being both new and good. To be sure, Lilli is green as a teacher, but she also shows a lot of good instincts. She is also very willing to plan her lessons thoughtfully (something many of our veteran faculty are not always interested in doing). Most importantly, she is someone who I know will be open to suggestion and would never see the observation process as adversarial.

- **What was the lesson about (brief description)?**

Lilli was doing a lesson that was reviewing what she had taught the kids about the early part of Moses' life. She wanted to see if the kids had fully grasped (and retained) the highlights of what she had covered in class.

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

Using the inquiry skills we had learned at MTEI, I asked Lilli to explain how she had decided upon which parts of the story were the "important" ones for the children to have mastered. I wanted to get "inside the kitchen" to see how she had begun constructing her review. After all (I reasoned), in order to assess the kids' knowledge, she had to figure out what she had wanted them to be able to do.

I also asked her to explain why she chose particular activities for her lesson. I wanted to understand what she wanted the activities to produce from the children (i.e. how was activity X supposed to demonstrate that the kids knew what she wanted them to know).

- **Which questions worked well? What's your hunch about why?**

The first question (asking her to explain which parts of the story were salient for her lesson) was a winner. It really helped the rest of the conversation to have understood why the lesson was set up as I had seen it I had a much better grasp of why things flowed the way they did when I knew what choices had been made to set that flow in motion.

The second question (asking about choice of activities) was helpful, but not as much as I had hoped. I am not sure if it was my phrasing or my tone (or something else subconscious that I did not intend to convey), but I could sense that Lilli was a bit defensive in answering that question. I think that she was concerned that I did not approve of the activities she had chosen when in fact I was merely curious about her decision process.

- **How did you use your observational record?**

I did my best to treat my record as a transcript. I wanted to try my best to simply recount what I had seen in class and let Lilli jump in whenever she wanted to give me her view of what I had seen. In essence, I wanted her to contextualize the (hopefully) objective reporting I had done on what had transpired in her classroom. Happily, she did just that (for the most part).

- **What did you learn about this teacher's thinking and practice?**

Most importantly, I learned that Lilli is doing a great job of trying to "begin with the end in mind" (one of the basic tenets of UBD that I try to stress). She genuinely wanted to construct a lesson that met certain goals rather than simply coming up with cool activities that the kids would enjoy (not that the two are mutually exclusive, but the planning she did made it much more likely that the two would combine). Her explanations of her process showed the thinking she put into the lesson and made it much easier for the two of us to come up with constructive feedback about what had transpired.

- **Did you have a chance to practice supporting and challenging? What did you learn about [those two techniques]?**

Definitely. I learned that I still have a lot to learn in this area. To be fair, this observation showed me to be a very good supporter. In letting Lilli explain her thinking about the planning and execution of the lesson, I helped her develop a lot of confidence in her own abilities. She felt very strong seeing me affirm the thinking she had done. At the same time, I still need work on how to challenge without putting someone on the defensive. Even when I was being objective in my reporting (I hope), the questions I asked still made Lilli feel as though she needed to justify choices she had made. I assured her that I was not asking for that justification (which helped her somewhat), but the process was already a bit "tainted" at that point. Once defensiveness is introduced into the observation equation, it is hard to get it out.

- **What did you learn about observing teaching? Taking notes?**

I learned that it's still *really* hard to both observe and record at the same time. I felt like I was missing so much every time my eyes turned toward my notebook. I know that feeling never totally goes away, but at this stage in my professional development, it feels that lack more strongly than I would care to. I need to find ways to notate more quickly so that I am able to record more quickly and see more of what is happening during the lesson.

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

I learned that it is very hard - even with a teacher who is open to feedback - to talk about teaching in a way that does not make a teacher feel as though there is a "right" answer that he/she is supposed to give. I am looking forward to getting more help in this area.