The Observation Cycle: how mentors can support student-teachers during teaching practice

Partnership Workshop 2
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Mentoring: Helping Hands

Why do mentors need to observe mentee’s lessons?

- Mentors develop their mentee’s professional thinking skills and support mentees in aspects of the processes of professional decision making or learning
The Observation Cycle

1. Co-planning with mentor
2. Pre-observation conference
3. Lesson observation
4. Post-lesson observation (Feedback)
5. Reflection (feed-forward)
Part 1: preparing for the lesson observation

Co-planning & pre-observation conference
The nature of classroom observation

- Observation plays a central role teaching practice
- But the presence of an observer in the classroom sometimes influences the nature of the lesson
- STs may ‘over prepare’ & feel very anxious about the observation process
- SO
- What can we do as mentors to put the student at ease?
Classroom life is complex

- Help students understand that classroom life is complex
- Focus on development – it’s OK if the lesson doesn’t go according to plan!
Classroom life is complex

• Help ST see the value of lesson observations - observing classroom life will increase our awareness of problems and increase our understanding of how to improve the situation
• (Good and Brophy, 2008)
Purpose of the pre-lesson observation conference

- The purpose of the pre-observation conference is to review the student-teacher's teaching plan, including the lesson goal, objective, strategies/methodology, and assessment.
Pre-observation conference

- Once you have set a date for the observation, make time to have a quick chat (10-15 mins) before the observation so the ST can tell you what they will do in the lesson.
- It allows the mentor and the ST to ‘connect’ before the observation.
- Ask the ST if there are any changes to the plan.
- Areas they would like you to focus on.
Questions you can ask the ST:

• What is the main goal of your lesson?
• What do you expect the learners to be able to know and do by the end of your class?
• What strategies/methods will you use to help the learners to reach these objectives?
• How will you assess whether the learners reached the objectives? In other words, how will they show that they know and can do what you expected of them?
• Do you have any concerns that you would like the observer to address?
Part 2: Lesson observation: what should we observe?
Some possible things we can observe in a lesson observation

- Lesson structure
- Classroom management strategies
- Types of teaching activities (pair work, group work)
- Teaching strategies (presenting tasks, organising learning)
- Teacher’s use of materials
- Teacher’s use of language (questions, feedback)
- Students’ use of language
- Student interaction (S-S talk)
How often should observations be conducted during TP?

- Be flexible
- Negotiate with the ST
- Once a week
- Let students observe you to learn
Writing Feedback for Mentees
Language of Feedback

1. **Mainly evaluative comments**: Assessing strengths and weaknesses E.g. That was good, excellent, great,

2. **Mainly advisory comments**: E.g I suggest that you do...next time

3. **Mainly questions**: Asking open-ended questions to elicit information/comments from the student-teacher. E.g How did you think the students responded to your task?

4. **Mainly descriptive comments**: what happened in the lesson. E.g. You walked over to the group and interacted with them....
Analysing the language of feedback

• Now look at the feedback you wrote for Sam, how would you describe your comments?
• is it mainly...
  ▫ Advisory?
  ▫ Evaluative?
  ▫ Descriptive?
  ▫ Questioning?
• Can you turn the evaluative comments into questions to encourage self-reflection?
The Post Lesson Conference

- This takes place after the lesson observation (same day if possible)
- Find a quiet space to dialogue
- Create a warm, friendly and informal climate
  - Tone of voice
  - Body language
  - Eye contact
- Begin with questions & 😊!
  - “What went well in the lesson today?”
  - “What surprised you in the lesson today?”
  - “Which task really engaged the learners?”
The Post Lesson Conference

- Be an active listener ( & take notes?)
- Help the ST to identify episodes of good teaching first (medals)
- Allow ST time to reflect & ask questions
- Help them to make sense of their experience
- Ask critical questions & set new targets (missions)
  - Why weren’t you able to achieve all your objectives?
  - What new methods or techniques could you try next time to improve the lesson?
  - Why was the last part of the lesson so effective?
Feedback for Development

Which approach should I take as a mentor?
Different Approaches to Post Lesson Conference

• **The supervisory approach**
  The observer comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson and teachers’ performance. Suggestions for change and improvements are made concerning a variety of things, such as lesson plan, lesson sequence, discipline, seating arrangements, etc. (Freeman 1982, p22)
Different Approaches to Post Lesson Conference

- **The alternative approach**

  Observer suggests alternatives in a non-evaluative way. The observer hopes to stimulate the teacher to think critically and thereby broaden the scope of what s/he will do in the classroom situation. (Freeman 1982, p22)
Different Approaches to Post Lesson Conference

• The non-directive approach
  The observer asks the teachers lots of questions and aims to build a relationship with the observee which is supportive in the fullest sense. The objective of this approach is not to judge or evaluate, but to understand and to clarify. The observer plays the role of a listener to help teacher make sense of their own experience. (Freeman 1982, p22)
Post-observation reflection

Questions helpful for STs to self-reflect:
- Did the students achieve the aims set?
- What worked well and why? What effect did these strategies have on the students?
- What did not work so well? Why? What was the effect on the students?
- What would I do differently if I were to do the lesson again? Why? What would be the potential effect on the students?
- In general what are my strengths?
- In general what are my targets for further development?
Help student-teachers set new learning targets for next lesson
Plenary

The Observation Cycle
The Observation Cycle

- Help ST *think back to think forward*
- Reassure them it will never be 100% initially.
- Beginning teachers aren’t and cannot be experienced teachers.
- Signal your acceptance and encourage them to keep trying & don’t give up!
- Encourage them to ask questions and address those questions in their reflection.
- Give signal that you trust and value their judgment
- Believe they are capable!
- Always end on a positive note!
Mentor’s Reflection

• How will my feedback affect the self-image of the student-teacher?
• How will my feedback help the ST’s development?
• How can I create space to encourage the ST to explore new teaching ideas?
• How can I help the ST to monitor her own development / progress during MTP?
• How can make help the ST to believe s/he will make it through MTP & stay sane ?!
“Who finds a mentor, finds a treasure”  S L Kapur

THANK YOU
Q & A