

Mock Pre-Observation Discussion

William Staros Jr.

Third Grade Lead Teacher

Six Mile Charter Academy

Lee County, Fort Myers, Florida

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As a teacher in the charter school company I work for I am used to conducting observations, which we call site visits, and post observation feedback sessions two or three times a year. Through this practice I have become quite accustomed to being positive and allowing the teacher to lead the discussion. No ideas or critique is offered until such a time that it is requested. Through prompting questions I am able to pull the areas of concern and success from the teachers, even those that are reluctant. That being said, I have not had an experience with a pre-observation discussion because the site visits are unannounced to the staff of each school until the morning we arrive. We take time to look at the lesson plans for the day and the objective on the board and then we observe whether or not they have reached that goal and if the kids understand. This is the extent of the pre-observation process. When it came time to choose a teacher on staff to conduct this three part process, I choose Mrs. Laura Eding, who gave me permission to use her name in text. Mrs. Eding is a first grade teacher who has been with the company for seven years and has been a mentor, team lead, curriculum planner, and site visit observer. Her ability to work with parents, teachers, students, and staff makes her a great all around person to observe. I feel that I can be critical and use my skills and not come across negative as I may with a more novice teacher.

When I approached Mrs. Eding in the hallway one day after school, I started by asking her how her year was going and if there were any of those trouble spots we all encounter. We chatted for a time about our respective classes before I asked her to observe her room. She was quite pleased to invite me into her room to observe and was quick to say she wanted an honest opinion of her science instruction (personal communication, October 1, 2010). Following a discussion on schedules we set a day and

time for an observation as well as the pre-observation discussion. During the discussion Mrs. Eding was positive but seemed a bit unsure of her teaching style in reaching the higher kids in science. With limited technology in the school and limited resources, she found herself providing fewer hands on experiments; something she was upset about.

Danielson (2007) calls the pre-conference the planning conference. The purpose is to highlight the planning process and the way lesson plans are completed and how they fit into the larger framework of teaching and understanding (p. 178). Many domains and components come into play during the pre-observation conference. Of the questions that Danielson (2007) suggests, I chose four of them: To what part of your curriculum does this lesson relate? Briefly describe the students in the class, including those with special needs. What are your learning outcomes and what do you want the kids to understand? How will you differentiate instruction for different individuals or groups of students in the class?

1. To what part of your curriculum does this lesson relate?

Laura said that this lesson would be a science lesson that would relate to animals, their habitats and how they grow and change within those habitats. She mentioned that this lesson would be the third lesson in the unit, with the first two lessons being on what animals were and what a habitat is. This is the next lesson that will require the kids to relate those two lessons together and form new knowledge on how they grow and change (personal communication, October 1, 2010).

2. Briefly describe the students in the class, including those with special needs.

In this first grade class there are 21 students together for the day. Our school functions as an inclusion school so students are often grouped and leveled based on

their abilities. Of the 21 students, Mrs. Eding said two are being tested for gifted, one has special needs with language development and understanding, and four are ADHD diagnosed and need special attention with behavior. These students come from many backgrounds and household types (personal communication, October 1, 2010).

3. What are your learning outcomes and what do you want the kids to understand?

The learning outcomes are to classify animals into groups based on how they are alike and to describe character traits for mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. The students should be able to sort animal pictures into these 4 groups and describe why they sorted that way. This learning activity allows the students to produce a product that shows they can match groups based on their characteristics (personal communication, October 1, 2010).

4. How will you differentiate instruction for different individuals or groups of students in the class?

The lesson will be differentiated by having a lot of visuals, by working in groups and by having students reading by themselves at their level. The lesson will start with a PowerPoint that reviews the traits of the four animal groups with the whole class. Then we will take the pictures of animals and decide together which group they should go into. There will be a mammal traits graph for the overhead that the students also have. Mrs. Eding will read the questions from the chart and have the students decide with their table group (4-5 students) if that animal has that character trait. For example, are its babies born alive? We will close our lesson by going over

the answers and then students will read leveled readers about animals independently (personal communication, October 1, 2010).

In reviewing the components of the framework (p.47-63) Mrs. Edings' pre-observation conference shows off her ability of Domain 1a-Demonstrating Knowledge of Content, through the relationship of this lesson to the larger big idea of animals in their habitats and groups. Within this component, the element that is focused on is her knowledge of prerequisite relationships (p. 47). Mrs. Eding also has a clear understanding of Domain 1b-Demonstrating Knowledge of Students, through her knowledge and understanding of the medical, learning, and home details of her class. Through this she knows that she needs to include visuals, technology, and relating things to their real lives. She also understands the element of knowing her students skills, knowledge, and language proficiency (p.50). Finally, Mrs Edings' lesson insight provides proof that she demonstrates Domain 1c-Setting Instructional outcomes. Her stated objective, use of the science curriculum maps, and the lesson sequence charts she has met the element of value, sequence, and alignment (p. 54). In addition, her interactive and grouped lesson provides suitability for diverse learners (p. 54).

One of the final things that I asked Mrs. Eding was what she wanted me to focus on in terms of her lesson and delivery. She mentioned technology and how to increase or use what she is using ore effectively. Without me knowing it at the time, this fit into Domain 1d-Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources. Mrs. Eding knew that she had an issue and needed some feedback. This proves she is interested in improving her resources for classroom use and resources to extend content knowledge and pedagogy (p. 56).

Through this process I became more attuned to listening for a teachers feeling and intonation in her discussion of the lesson. You can tell from speaking with people whether they feel comfortable, at ease, or tense/nervous about a lesson. This inner feeling is often expressed through a lesson and students pick up on this. This can often have a bigger impact on the success of a lesson than the lesson itself. As Danielson (2007) says, designing instruction is a different skill from implementing a plan in the classroom, and both skills are crucial to the enhancement of learning (p. 57).

References

Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing professional practice*. Alexandria, Va.: ASCD