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LESSON OBSERVATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PURPOSES

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Rezumat: Scopul dezvoltării profesionale este ca profesorul să genereze schimbări prin creșterea sau schimbarea conștiinței sale față de cum și pentru cine oferă cunoștințe relevante. Analiza și studierea în cadrul orelor de curs a colegilor le permite profesorilor să-și construiască o capacitate individuală și să dezvolte o înțelegere comună a practicii eficiente la clasă. De asemenea, le permite profesorilor să își dezvolte capacitatea de a oferi și primi feedback-ul într-o manieră amiabilă. Cercetările arată că, atunci când sunt făcute binevoitor, analiza colegilor, inclusiv feedback-ul și reflecția, are un impact substanțial asupra îmbunătățirii practicii profesionale și poate fi o parte notabilă în cursul dezvoltării profesionale a profesorului.

Civinte-cheie: întâlnire pre-observare, observare lecție, întâlnire post-observare, observare de la egal la egal, auto-reflecție.

Teacher development is viewed as a continuous process that begins with preservice teacher preparation and spans the entire career of the teacher [7, p. 13]. Teacher training involves giving novices and experienced teachers alike “ready-made answers” as opposed to “allowing them to discover their own alternatives” [4, p. 42]. According to Davis and Plumb [1, p. 40] training entails a “pre-planned” agenda set by the workplace or syllabus as opposed to an “impromptu, flexible agenda set by groups;” “needs of work-place” as opposed to “personal needs;” “qualification” as opposed to “career development”, “leader and experts” as opposed to “peer group;” and “standardization” as opposed to “innovation.” Freeman [3, p. 39] considers development as a strategy of influence and indirect intervention that comes with complex, integrated aspects of teaching. These parts are idiosyncratic and individual. The purpose of development is for the teacher to generate change through increasing or shifting his/her awareness.

Lesson observation

What is lesson observation, and how does it relate to teacher development? Simply put, lesson observation means sitting in on a class and observing a teacher in action. Maingay [5, p. 67] divides lesson observation into four categories: a) observation for training, b) observation for development, c) observation for assessment, d) and observer development.

Observation for training

Student teachers (STs) are taught to produce elaborate, step by step, rigid lesson plans, which they usually abandon as useless and time-consuming once they leave school. There is usually no meeting between the observer and the teacher prior to the observation. Sometimes there is a non-structured, post-observation meeting and where this exists, data collected during the lesson may touch on everything the observer could see. The feedback is often unidirectional

in which the observer is the expert who tells the ST what s/he did well and what s/he did poorly. Some observers, often the teacher trainer, take delight in dishing out observation data in devastating language—negative, judgmental feedback that only discourages the neophyte. Evaluation is based solely on one or two lessons taught under examination conditions with one or more examiners determining the fate of the candidate. There are few clearly defined objective criteria for grading these lessons. Demonstration lessons, a vital element of training, often given by the trainer or the **cooperating teacher (COOPT)** are meant to be imitated by the ST resulting in what Maingay [5, p. 32] calls “ritual teaching behavior.” STs are rarely given a chance to try out techniques that are unknown to the COOPT or the trainer-observer especially when this observer is another one of the teachers in the institution. There is generally no COOPT to observe lessons on a lesson-to-lesson basis as the class teacher is often away “having other fish to fry.” COOPT teachers instruct STs and ensure that instructions leading to conditioned behavior are carried out without due consideration to initiatives that the ST may want to take. Generally, feedback in training is judgmental, firm, and directive.

Observation for teacher development

The ST is not instructed to reproduce a prescribed lesson plan. Instead, the ST is provided with broad guidelines and explanatory notes justifying the inclusion of certain activities based on lesson objectives. Lesson observation is cyclical consisting of a ***pre-observation meeting***, the ***observation*** itself, and a ***post-observation meeting***. The lesson observer is a full partner in the **teaching practice (TP)** exercise; s/he is punctual, sits in during the entire lesson, taking notes (data) on the goals/targets set at the pre-observation discussion. The observer does not intervene during the lesson unless the *whens* and the *hows* have been agreed upon during the pre-observation meeting. Feedback is given in the most objective manner possible as the observer tries to avoid being judgmental.

Observation for assessment

Teachers can collaboratively observe each other for professional development purposes. These peer observations are confidential and non-evaluative in nature.

Peer observations benefit both the observer and the observed teacher:

- Observers see new techniques in action, get new ideas for their teaching toolkits, and can reflect on their own assumptions, beliefs, and teaching practices based on what they witness.
- Observed teachers benefit from analyzing the descriptive data the observer collects about classroom interactions and the class environment; they can also grow through discussions that result from observer questions and suggestions to improve learning outcomes.
- Based on their discussions and reflections, participants can develop action plans or action research projects to improve their teaching practice.
- Peer observations can also improve camaraderie, deepen collaboration, and increase self-awareness among participating teachers.

Observer Considerations

Things to look for while you observe:

- What are the major lesson stages and the associated timing and interaction patterns?

Things to consider as you review your records and prepare for the post-observation meeting:

- What has the teacher done especially well?
- Were the students engaged? How did you know?
- Were there a variety of activities?
- Was there a lot of STT (student talk time)?
- What activities do you enjoy the most / find the most interesting?
- What questions do you need to ask about unobservable information?
- Do you have suggestions for improvement or alternative?
- What have you learned about your own teaching practices, beliefs, and assumptions based on this observation?

Observed Teacher: Reflection Form

After your lesson, use the prompts below to make notes about the positive aspects and areas for improvement or desired changes. Complete this form before the post-observation meeting with your colleague. Be sure to bring these notes to the meeting.

Lesson Plan and Activities:

- Did your lesson go as planned?
- Did you meet the lesson’s objectives?
- Were your activities effective and appropriate for this learner group?
- How was your time-management?

Personal Qualities and Communication

- Did you enjoy teaching and did you convey this to your students?
- How was your classroom management?
- Did the lesson include STT opportunities and varied interaction patterns?
- Where did you position yourself in the classroom?
- How did you react to students’ responses, non-responses, and errors?

Materials:

- How well did your materials work in the lesson?
- Did you encounter any problems?
- How could you have improved the materials themselves or the way you used them?

Observation Focus Areas

• Make notes about your performance in relation to the areas you asked your colleague to observe.

Summary:

• How will you apply what you learned today to improve your planning and teaching of future lessons?

Observer development

The cyclical supervisory model of lesson observation

The cyclical supervisory model consists of the same three phases of the teacher development model. During the pre-observation meeting, the observer and the teacher himself/herself set a limited number of professional targets. These may be any aspect(s) of the lesson that the ST in-service trainer would like the observer to target. Depending upon the needs

of a particular ST/teacher, both the observer and the teacher may choose to run through a checklist established for this purpose consisting essentially of the following: lesson topic, lesson content, objectives, materials, prerequisite learning, lesson development, closure, student evaluation, etc. It is vital to hold this meeting well in advance of the observation to enable the teacher or ST to revise the lesson plan or other aspects of the class before the lesson is taught. **Pre-observation meetings**¹ are the time when the teacher and the observer can agree upon issues such as the observer's intervention during the lesson proper. Some teachers do not want intervention but others do. Peer teaching roles can also be discussed and assigned. The observer may refer the ST to relevant literature that may help in lesson planning and execution. S/he may also help the ST get access to specialized libraries which would otherwise have been impossible. The second phase of the clinical supervisory model is the **observation**² of the lesson itself. At this stage, the observer focuses strictly on the targets set at the **pre-observation meeting** and collects relevant data for the teacher's attention. The data thus collected constitute a vital part of the content of the ST's teaching profile. The third and final phase of the cyclical supervisory model is the **post-observation meeting**³ at which the teacher and observer look back at the lesson and the data gathered. Another controversial issue is how feedback should be given during this phase of observation. Some teacher educators suggest that **data should be presented in the most non-judgmental manner possible** giving the teacher the opportunity to analyze the data and to make decisions as to its significance. Others suggest that positive feedback should be given to create a good climate for further discussion of the lesson and to give the ST a sense of accomplishment. Still, others say that the good points of the lesson should be pointed out to the teacher while the bad ones should be given in the form of suggestions for improvement. There are some who say that the trainer/observer should not be hypocritical and should tell the trainee what s/he did right or wrong in a direct manner. My own position on giving feedback to STs during post-observation meetings is simply to be eclectic for the simple reason that no single procedure will cover all teaching situations. In some situations, telling the ST directly and firmly what to do and what not to do may be the only acceptable way, but in others, this may be rejected for fear of encouraging dependency.

Conclusion

¹ **Pre-observation meeting:** The observer meets with the teacher before the class to learn about the lesson's focus and objectives. The teacher should define a focus area, perhaps related to something s/he would like to improve upon or a problem that s/he is trying to solve. Make sure you are both in agreement about how the observation will be conducted (duration, seating, etc.) and when the post-observation meeting will occur.

² **Observation:** The observed teacher should inform students about the observation before the lesson. The observer should arrive a few minutes early and be as discreet as possible: sit in the back of the room; focus solely on the observation and observe the entire lesson (or agreed upon segment); be open-minded and make detailed descriptive records in preparation for the post-observation meeting.

³ **Post-observation meeting:** This is the most important part of the observation process. Reflection before this meeting and the discussion about what happened in the classroom is when real learning for both the teacher and the observer occurs. Teachers should treat each other with respect and offer opinions in a kind and constructive way. Participants should set action plans/goals based on what they learn. Both teachers should walk away feeling like they have learned something new and will be better teachers because of it.

Peer observation enables teachers to build their individual capacity and develop a shared understanding of effective classroom practice. It also allows teachers to build their capability in giving and receiving feedback. Research shows that when done well, peer observation, including feedback and reflection, has a high impact on improving professional practice and can be an important part of a teacher’s professional development. The Victorian Teaching and Learning Model (including the Practice Principles for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the Pedagogical Model and the High Impact Teaching Strategies) can support teachers to determine the focus of peer observations. For example, areas of focus could include pedagogical approaches, curriculum planning, assessment strategies or opportunities for student voice and agency within the lesson. Peer observation can benefit both the teacher being observed and the observer. Peer observation can: 1) provide opportunities to discuss challenges and successes with trusted colleagues; 2) support the sharing of ideas and expertise among teachers; 3) build a community of trust through opening classroom practice to a wider audience; 4) support a focus on improving the impact of learning; 5) contribute to the collective efficacy of the whole school.

Guidance for the observer

Your role in self-reflection may be limited, however, it is valuable to be available to your colleague to guide and provide access to resources they may not be familiar with or unable to access (e.g. the School Strategic Plan, Annual Implementation Plan). Suggestions about professional reading or linking up with other colleagues who might have some expertise in the area can be ways of supporting the teachers’ self-reflection if they seek out the advice. Encouraging the teacher to self-reflect prior to the pre-observation conversation will ensure that the conversation is informed, and you can suitably engage with the teacher’s reflection.

Guidance for the teacher being observed

Self-reflection is an opportunity to consider how to maximize the outcomes of the peer observation by tailoring your focus to be specific, and about an area of your practice that will benefit your students’ learning through colleagues’ reflection and feedback. It is an opportunity to undertake individual reflection before engaging with your observer(s), however, some teachers may find it beneficial to seek others’ input during your self-reflection. There is no expectation for teachers to share their self-reflection material if they do not wish to. Consider how your focus aligns with whole-school priorities so that your work continues to benefit from school-based professional learning opportunities. Take this opportunity to reflect on your hopes, fears and expectations when participating in peer observation.

Being prepared for the classroom visit will support you to have a positive experience, and be mindful that you want the observation to be based on your usual practices, not uncharacteristic ones. Don’t alter your lesson planning significantly because of the observation. Ensure that your students are aware of the observation, particularly if they are not accustomed to having other visitors in your classroom. Remember that your observer is collecting evidence to inform collaborative reflection and feedback and to support you to enhance your effectiveness as a teacher – they are not judging the quality of your performance.

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