Clinical Field Experience D: Beginning Teacher Observation and Feedback

Ron Keller

College of Education, Grand Canyon University

EAD-530: Improving Teacher Performance and Self-efficacy

Instructor: John Utne

Due date: January 11, 2023

Michelle Meyers is an 8th grade Core Teacher at Orinda Intermediate School. Core Teachers teach English and History in rotating six period schedules. I conducted Meyer's pre-conference, observation, and post-conference with our principal Stacy Wayne. This is Mrs. Meyer's second year at OIS but technically her first year as a credentialed teacher, having just completed her certification about a month before.   Meyers came to teaching from a career in journalism, first as a reporter with the Oregonian newspaper, then as a writer for several tech websites in the Bay Area.

Her pre-conference was extremely casual as are most of the pre-conferences on our campus. Michelle presented a brief outline of her lesson plan. She informed us that students had spent time since Thanksgiving formulating and writing persuasive essays. They had broken down the parts of a five-paragraph essay, covering the meaning of "ethos, pathos, and logos," talked about persuasive language, transitional words, conventions and how to notate MLA citations. What we would observe would be students' peer reviews of their partner's essay.   Wayne told Michelle that she was encouraged by her progress as a teacher. Wayne then reviewed Mrs. Meyer's previous observations and offered reminders about the "flow" of a lesson, as well as maintaining interaction and equity when she called on students to answer questions. One suggestion was to incorporate a modified extension of the think-pair-share protocol, called a "share out" (Davenport, 2021).

Wayne also reminded Michelle to have her students do the "heavy lifting," that she needs to instruct and observe and not do their work for them. Having had a lot of experience teaching with tech in my classroom, I suggested she instruct the students to "taco" their computers when she needed their full attention, otherwise she risked the major points she

wanted to make in the lesson falling on deaf ears with students looking at their screens instead of paying attention to her.

As the observation began, I noticed Meyers violated one of our administration's rules to make the lesson's objective explicit by telling students what they were going to *learn* in the lesson. Michelle's presentation lacked self-assurance. She admitted later that she felt slightly scattered because she normally presented the lesson in a different order, but because she knew Mrs. Wayne and I were coming to observe her class she flipped the lesson around.

Maybe it was because she was forced to flip the order of her presentation to adjust to available observation time, but Michelle seemed to lack confidence in her instruction. This came across in different ways. For instance, she simply suggested students take out their mentor texts, a model argument essay, to use as a guide during their peer reviews. No students did it. Wayne pulled her aside—something she admitted she usually does not do—and let her know that when she wants students to do something it shouldn't be presented as a suggestion but rather a directive.

Meyers had created a handout with a checklist that students were to complete during their reviews. The checklist broke the essay down by paragraph instructing students to check off the 4-5 key attributes addressed in each paragraph. Meyers also wanted the students to write their impressions of what worked and what didn't paragraph by paragraph but once again she stated this as a request and not a requirement. Most students did nothing more than check off boxes on her handout.

I noticed several students chatting about things not related to the topic at hand. Several others looked at their chrome book screens and typed during Meyer's presentation. This is an

example of how technology can be an obstacle to learning which is why I suggested "tacoing" their computers while she made important points. It is too difficult for students to focus when multitasking on a computer since, "every time we shift our attention, our brain has to reorient itself, further taxing our mental resources" (Goundar, 2014).

Meyers also referred to several websites during her presentation that automatically created MLA formats for students, but she cautioned students that these sites often come with distracting ads. It would have been useful to have one of the websites open (i.e., mybib.com) and plug in a reference from one of the students' papers to show the class how the website works.

Our post-conference meeting started with Mrs. Wayne and me pointing out the positive qualities of the lesson. Students appeared to have made good headway on their essays. Meyers promoted a sense of equity and did a nice job of creating trust amongst the class by balancing her efforts to call on students who knew the answers to the questions she posed while drawing out questions and responses from students who seemed less likely to participate in the lesson. She also spent a good deal of time checking in on individual students who seemed to be struggling with peer editing, brainstorming ideas that encouraged them to engage with their partners in a positive, constructive way.

During the post conference, our most salient suggestion of Meyer's instruction concerned her shifting from instruction techniques from the historic teacher-centered model to a student-centered one. Our coaching included Meyers resist being the "sage on the stage," instead try to be more of a "guide on the side" using her skills to engage students in first-hand learning through projects and experiences (Stanton, 2019). The approach encourages students to collaborate and shifts the classroom into a more personal learning environment.

This last observation struck a chord with me. Following our post conference Mrs. Wayne and I discussed the benefits of observing other teachers during the coaching/observation section of my educational administration class. She said peer observations are a great way of helping all teachers, but especially younger teachers, mature as educators, and she is considering expanding the idea campus wide. Approaching the teacher observations reflectively has allowed me to examine my own teaching methods and think more clearly about ways they can be improved.

References

Davenport, M. (2021, October, 4). *Maximizing student voice to achieve equity in classroom*

participation. Edutopia. Retrieved on January 11, 2023 from

https://tinyurl.com/bdeyyd7r.

Goundar, S. (March 2014). The distraction of technology in the classroom. Journal of

Education & Human Development. 3(1). 211-229.

Stanton, P. (2019, April, 17). "Sage on the stage" vs. "guide on the side" education philosophy.

https://tinyurl.com/27acpfp6.