On Being Observed

An Interactive Presentation for Beginning Teachers in Adult Education
Many teachers fear being observed.

Why do you think classroom observations trigger such negative feelings despite the fact that teachers are observed on a daily basis by their students?

(Source: Farrell, 2003, p. 60)
Teachers may resist being observed because they worry they will look incompetent. They may also feel as if they must defend what they did in the classroom rather than explain their practices in light of their teaching goals.

There is a need to reframe observations as opportunities for reflective conversations about teaching with others rather than “defensive, unproductive conversations.”

(Farrell, 2003, p. 60)
Presentation Goals

1. To invite reflection on our hopes and fears about being observed by colleagues and mentors

2. To reframe observations as a basis for conversations about teaching rather than as evaluations
Meanings of Mentorship

A mentor is an experienced and exemplary teacher who nurtures professional growth in a beginning teacher by sharing knowledge and insights and supporting beginning teachers in their professional learning and growth.
Meaning of Mentorship — Two More Stories

- A story from ancient Africa
  - Designation of an older child to listen carefully and ask questions of a younger child
  - “Habari gani menta” or “What’s happening?”

- A story from ancient caves in Southern France
  - Drawings of men advising children at the borders of the physical world
  - Mentorship as “being given a tour” of what lies just beyond

Depictions of Mentors and Implications for Their Role as Observers

1. Mentors as experienced, wiser advisors
2. Mentors as those who ask “What’s happening?” in your life as a teacher
3. Mentors as those who embolden you to “tour” your own practice, to go to the “edge” and look beyond
There is no one “right” way for a mentor to support you in the observation process. Mentors may have different approaches to supporting new teachers, which may shape the way they interact during a classroom observation.
REFLECTION

- Which depiction do you like most, and why?
- Can you think about teachers in your life who have played these different roles? In what ways did they help you grow as a teacher?
- As you contemplate being observed, what kind of mentoring approach would you find most useful in your current teaching context?
On Being Observed: Voices of Two Teachers

Ana Wu

Erin Lake
On Being Observed

Meet Ana Wu

- Currently English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at City College of San Francisco
- Born and raised in Brazil
- Taught in Japan for 5 years
- 2009 Chair-Elect of the Non-Native Speakers of English (NNEST) in Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Interest Section
On Being Observed

As you listen to Ana:

In what ways does Ana remind you of someone you know, or your own experiences with observation?

What do you think Ana took away from these early observation experiences?
On Being Observed

Meet Erin Lake

- ESL teacher at the American Academy of English in San Francisco
- Has taught in South Korea
- Received her MA in English at San Francisco State University
- Interested in understanding the intersection between technology and the TESOL field
On Being Observed

As you listen to Erin:
In what ways does Erin remind you of someone you know, or your own experiences with observation?
What do you think Erin took away from these early observation experiences?
Recap

- **Range of emotions**
  - Embarrassed, very submissive, very concerned with my deficiencies (Ana)
  - Nerve-wracking, fairly painless (Erin)

- **Needing to align own teaching with observer’s expectations**
  - “My main focus was to impress her instead of being engaged in my own professional development” (Ana)
  - “You’re trying to match [your mentor teacher’s] expectations… while establishing your own…style” (Erin)

- **Mentor behaviors that (would have) helped me**
  - “Focus on my reality” and “brainstorm options” not “what she would have done” (Ana)
  - “Rarely took notes” >> “she was just another participant” without judgment (Erin)
  - “Allowed me to share my initial impressions before she offered her own” (Erin)
Reflection

“We lose heart, in part, because teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability.”

Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage To Teach*

- In what ways do you agree that “teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability”?
- In what ways can ongoing observations and collegial talk about these observations help new teachers feel less vulnerable?
- How have you found this to be true in your own teaching?
REFLECTION

Which teacher selves are public, private, hidden...?
(Luft & Ingram, 1969, as cited in Bailey, Curtis & Nunan, 2001)

- **Open (public) self**—Insights about a teacher’s behavior known to the teacher and others; information that the teacher is willing and able to share

- **Secret (private) self**—Insights known to the teacher but not to others, e.g., a teacher is struggling to implement a new set of course guidelines but is unable to share his/her uneasiness with colleagues, worried that others will judge him/her as incompetent

- **Blind self**—Insights known to others but not to the teacher, e.g., a teacher may unknowingly be reinforcing stereotypes about “quiet Asian students” without realizing it, even though other students may recognize this pattern

- **Hidden self**—Insights not known to the teacher or to others in the school environment

How can teachers support one another—through mentorship and observation—to explore these dimensions in our teaching?
Meet Estefany

- Coordinates a service learning program and teaches ESL in Boise, Idaho
- Received her MA in TESOL at San Francisco State University in 2010
- Taught ESL at community college and intensive English programs in San Diego, Albuquerque, Chicago, and Boise
On Mentors as “Mirrors”

As you listen to Estefany:
Think about how teachers in your life have been “mirrors” for you. What was that experience like? What role did observation play in this “mirroring” dynamic?
Recap:
Expanded Views on Being Observed

- Conversations about “what’s happening” in classrooms
- “Taking a tour” of your own classroom practice
- Looking into “mirrors”
Special Thanks

- Ana Wu, ESL instructor, City College of San Francisco, San Francisco, California
- Erin Lake, ESL Instructor, American Academy of English, San Francisco, California
- Estefany Giehm, Coordinator and ESL Instructor, Services to Older Refugees, English Language Center, Boise, Idaho
About the LINCS Website

Teacher Effectiveness in Adult Education

Research indicates that teacher effectiveness determines student achievement and performance. To develop successful students, one focus of adult education programs should be on developing and supporting effective teachers, especially those new to adult education or the profession. This page includes a variety of resources and tools to enhance teacher effectiveness in adult education.

Adult Education Teacher Competencies

The Competencies identify the knowledge and skills expected of any adult education teacher. A Self-Assessment, introductory online course, and interactive framework are also available.

Evidence Based Instruction

Learn about evidence-based instruction principles and strategies highlighted in the National Research Council’s Improving Adult Literacy Instruction: Supporting Learning and Motivation.

Information Brief: Evidence-Based Instruction and Teacher Induction

- Online Courses on Evidence-Based Instruction
  - Principles of Learning for Instructional Design
  - Motivating Adult Learners to Persist

Teacher Induction

Teacher induction is an evidence-based strategy to accelerate the effectiveness of beginning teachers and those new to adult education or a new content area.
References


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