

The Observation Cycle

The Pre-Observation

The Supervisor/Teacher Relationship

Randy has been teaching business and technology for 11 years, the last 10 in an urban high school. He has a very easygoing temperament, has a great rapport with students, and is very knowledgeable in his subject area (multimedia, digital video, computer survey courses). Randy and I are both teachers in the same department.

The Setting

Computers are set on tables that ring the outer walls. The student's backs are to the teacher and he can see every screen at a glance. There are four tables in the middle of the classroom. The students are 10, 11, and 12 graders completing Multimedia 1.

Addressing Concerns

The primary concern is that while Randy is a wonderful person, he can be a bit passive with students.

The Structure

During the Pre-Observation Conference there are several questions to be covered.

1. Tell me what you are hoping to the students will learn?
2. What strategies will you use to help students learn?
3. How will you assess student knowledge?
4. What will you do if they don't get it?
5. What data would you like for me to get?
6. Any special situations?

Pre-Observation Conference

Pete (i): We're just going to go through what will be happening in your class tomorrow and what I'll be looking for. In years past our observations have been conducted to primarily fulfill the contract obligation. This year we would really like to provide everyone with meaningful information to improve your classroom instruction. Personally, I'm pretty excited about it. I think we'll be getting to some good info that you can really use.

Randy (i): Thanks; it will be nice to get another teacher's perspective of my class and teaching strategies.

Pete (1): Tell me what you are hoping the students will learn today.

Randy (1): Today we will be going over the basics of "Flash animation", so hopefully at the end of class the students will be able to identify the key components of the workspace and be able to build a basic animation.

Pete (2): What strategies will you be using to help students learn?

Randy (2): I'll show the students examples of where they're going and then hand out a packet that steps them through the process. A few lessons down the road they'll have to apply their knowledge and create an animation on their own.

Pete (3): How will you be assessing the students to see if they are getting it?

Randy (3): I'll be walking around the room observing them and pointing out mistakes if they make any. I'll also have them do a test in about a week to see if they can do it without help.

Pete (4): What will you do if they aren't getting it?

Randy (4): Well if they still aren't getting it I have to figure out if they are just being lazy or they really aren't getting it. Usually I have them read the directions to me and ask them if they've done just that. They usually get it from there. Other times the directions are confusing and then I can clarify or show them. Sometimes the projector really helps so they can see someone else do it right before they do. I want to be careful though not doing too much for them. We have to help them help themselves.

Pete (5): Is there anything in particular that you would like feedback on? Anything I can help you with?

Randy (5): Yes, I would like feedback on how I presented the information. Was it clear for the students, too complicated, or did I confuse them? What can I do to present the information so the majority of my students can learn?

Pete (6): Are there any specific situations I should be aware of?

Randy (6): Not really, this is a really good class, very smart and motivated students; they should grasp this concept easily.

Pete (c): Great! I'm excited to see what all you're doing.

Randy (c): I look forward to your comments when we're finished.

Pre-Observation Conference Summary

The Pre-Observation Conference went well. Even though we do not have the most productive observation history at our school, I firmly believe that most teachers want to do the best job they can. It is our responsibility to find the most encouraging way to help them succeed. I think the pre-conference helped to shift the focus just a bit and build a little confidence in the purpose of the conference.

The Observation – Narrative

The class began with Randy showing students the outcome of the packet they are about to receive. This is done via a LCD projector. The animation visibly creates excitement for several students. He then handed out lesson packets and explained the lesson, outlined the goal for the day and his expectations clearly. Randy also highlighted several issues that he expected to be pitfalls for students. Several students became distracted during this task and he both verbally and by proximity re-directed the students to note the issues regarding the lesson.

Each student was very much on task going through the packet. For quite a while none requested his help so he just watched from the center of the room ensuring the students stayed on task. Several times students asked for help but Randy said he would be there in a minute. I believe this was intentional in order to allow time for the students to figure the problem out on their own. Students solved their own problems. He then made the effort to make sure this was the case and the student didn't feel ignored by following up to each student several minutes later after students had ample time to solve their own problems.

After about half the period more students needed his help and he has happy to do so. The attached notes show the path throughout the room.

Analysis of the Observation

The bottom line for any classroom is that students learn. It was evident that in Randy's classes students learn...and they enjoy it. Randy could be considered a successful, experienced teacher so my input will focused on improving small details and directing him to new materials on increasing student achievement such as McRel's Nine Strategies that Increase Students Achievement.

Guiding Questions:

1. How did you think it went?
2. Is there anything you would like to do differently?
3. How did the students do?
4. How do you grade the assignment?
5. How are you coming on your official DPS goals?
6. What's one area you would like to improve?

(In the future I will probably narrow these questions down to focus more on what I would like the teacher to focus on, in this case McRel research.)

The Post Observation Conference

Pete (1): How did you think it went?

Randy (1): It seemed to go pretty well. Sometimes it seems a little slow from the teacher side. But if they are working and seem to be getting the info it's just fine. I have to be careful of helping too much. If I do they don't process through the issues enough and won't be able to apply their knowledge nor learn tech issues outside the classroom environment.

Pete (2): Is there anything you would like to do differently?

Randy (2): The one thing that really bugs me about teaching tech is that almost all the materials out there for school kids stick. So we end up making almost everything ourselves. So when and if I have time I really like to tweak the actual tutorials.

Pete (3): How did the students do? How do you grade the assignment?

Randy (3): I think all but two got it all done within the hour. Most went on to the next assignment. I'll actually introduce it tomorrow, but the advanced kids can just keep right on going. I have a simple checklist to make sure they all had the four components I was looking for.

Pete (4): Now what are your official DPS goals?

Randy (4): Whatever they gave us. I'm sure it had something to do with increase reading and math. The pre and post data that relates to my goals was from first semester. So it's just a matter of looking it up and correlating the data.

Pete (4b): Since I'm not a real administrator I don't have access to them. We'll assume they would have them and be able to speak directly towards them. ☺

Randy (4b): Sounds good.

Pete (5): One area I'd like to look at is feedback. There's a great McRel study that shows that good and immediate feedback can increase student learning by 23%. I'll give you a copy if you're interested.

Randy (5): I'd love it. I feel that I do a good job on quiz feedback and have pretty clear assignments but I struggle with the amount of direct help in class. If we do too much it really gets in the way of their learning.

Pete (5): Great. I'll put it in your box and maybe we can brainstorm some ideas. It might even be a good conversation for the CTE department. I'd be happy to help in anyway. Keep me posted.

Randy (5): Sound great.

Pete (6): Anything else?

Randy (6): Nope.

Pete (6): Great thanks for coming.

Randy (6): No problem.

Analysis of the Post-Observation Conference

I thought the conference went well. We were both at ease and focused on how students could better learn. I could do a much better job of writing specific things that he did well such as class management and student rapport. (We did have this conversation, but not as a part of the post observation conference.) I was focused on asking my analysis questions and focusing on the feedback component. In the future I think I'll not just focus on the "structure questions" but also on specifics from the observation.

Attached Notes

Attached, please find the notes from my observation.