

Maximizing the Benefits of Peer Observation

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Please note: I will be glad to share these slides after today's workshop. Just email me at bfranchini@albany.edu

Objectives for Today's Session

By the end of today's session, you will be able to

- Identify key pitfalls of a poorly-designed peer observation process
- Describe and implement some key best practices of classroom observation
- Observe a classroom scenario effectively
- Facilitate an effective post-observation conversation with an observee

“The Case of Rachel’s Class Observation”

Read the case on the purple handout and be prepared to answer some questions about it.

At your tables

Discuss and agree on a single answer for your group. Be prepared to use your number cards to indicate your answer when prompted.

Who bears responsibility for this situation?

1 = Donna (Rachel's mentor) is mostly responsible.

2 = Rachel is mostly responsible.

3 = Rachel's department (or department head) is mostly responsible.

4 = Donna, Rachel, and the department bear equal responsibility

What should happen next?

- What can Rachel do to salvage her review?
- What can Donna do to help Rachel and to salvage their relationship?
- What can the department head do?

Some Lessons from Rachel's Case

- Drop-in classroom observations can lead to problems
- Classroom observation is only one part of a full peer review process and must be put in a context.
- Pre-tenure faculty need to take responsibility for making the process work for them.
- Communication is key to a productive process.

Let's Practice an Observation

You've been invited to observe a class in economics on game theory.

As you observe, take notes on what seem to be key behaviors of the instructor and of the students.

Take enough notes that you will be able to recall the rough outlines of what happens and the “high points” of communication, action and attempts to engage students.

<http://oyc.yale.edu/economics/econ-159/lecture-1>

Class session: Introduction—Five First Lessons
Minutes 31:30--39:00

On your Own

Fill out the check-box part of the observation form.

Note: The Observation Form

...should be aligned with the teaching values and principles you want to promote.

On your own

Rate this professor (on this day)

Write down your rating using the following scale.

1. Excellent—he's among the best, and there's little that we could tell him to improve what he does.
2. Good—there are just a few things he could do more effectively.
3. Fair—there are many things he could do more effectively.
4. Poor—not effective; he needs to overhaul what he's doing or make plans for another career.

In a small group

Rate this professor (on this day)

Share your ratings with each other and come to consensus on a group rating. When you get the signal, hold up the number card that corresponds with how you scored this professor.

Justify your group's judgment

What are some specific things that happened that support the score you gave?

With your group

Sketch an outline of the report you will write for the economics professor.

- What's the overall judgment and why?
- What seems to be his teaching “strategy” or method?
- What are some illustrations of his effective practice?
- What are some problems and/or specific ways he could improve?

Writing a report

(Evaluation = thesis + evidence)

Excellent (Report → Characterize his strategy; then describe what he does so well)

Good (Report → Characterize his strategy; describe what he does well; then describe places to improve)

Fair (Report → Characterize his strategy; describe anything he does well; then elaborate on multiple important ways he can improve)

Poor (Report → Characterize his strategy; describe places where there was a reasonable effort, if there was one; describe in detail the ways he can improve)

Sample Report

Take a minute to read over the blue handout, a sample ***summative evaluation report*** for a professor in Political Science.

Feel free to share any observations about the report.

Reminder: an essential distinction that shapes the peer observation process

- **Formative Assessment**: to inform and improve practice
 - confidential, non-judgmental
 - aligned with specific needs/values of individual
 - focused on process (*how could you do it differently?*)
 - can be used to prepare for summative evaluations
- **Summative Assessment (Evaluation)**: to inform personnel decisions
 - “public” (i.e., visible in the review process)
 - aligned with publicly expressed values of the department
 - focused on output, results, outcome (*how effective are you compared to departmental standards and expectations?*)

Sample Report

Take a minute to read over the green handout, a sample ***formative assessment report*** for the same professor/class.

How is this different from the summative report?

Let's do it again!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzpQtSHEtn8>

Reminder: Peer Observation Process

1. Observer and observee meet/communicate to plan visit.
2. Observation occurs, using pre-determined instrument, guide and/or questions.
3. Observer and observee meet/communicate to exchange observations and feedback.
- (4. If requested or required: creation of a written record.)

Pre-observation

What you've learned from the instructor you are about to observe:

1. This is an upper-division course for undergraduates called "The Economics of Crime."
2. The instructor's primary goal for this course is to have students begin thinking like economists. In this class meeting, he wants students to use principles of behavioral economics to make predictions about whether defendants will accept plea bargains.
3. He uses a teaching method that relies on frequent team tasks followed by brief mini-lectures to clarify concepts.
4. He expects you to see mostly student-centered work in the class, with students working in their groups primarily on their own with minimal instructor intervention.

Observe the class

Note: Most of the conversations happening in the student groups will not be decipherable. Keep your focus on the classroom activity overall.

Guidance on note-taking

- You are not making any judgments yet but recording what you see.
- You should be able to describe the class (in broad strokes or chunks or “movements”) back to the instructor.
- Identify salient actions and communications, interactions with students, and moments of effectiveness, as well as any awkward moments.
- Don't worry at this point about the content itself.

On Your Own

Take a few minutes to gather your thoughts about the class you just saw. You may now write any notes on the back page of the ethnography form.

With your group

1. Share your notes/observation forms and make any relevant comparisons.
2. Prepare your thoughts for how you will manage your conversation with this instructor. Draft a rough agenda for this meeting, including a list of questions that you would like to ask this instructor about his class.

Post-Observation

Imagine that I am the instructor you saw in the clip.

We are having a post-observation meeting. Take the role of the observer and debrief the classroom visit with me.

Post-Observation Meeting

Some first questions from observer to observee

- Was this a typical class?
- How do you think it went?
- Talk me through what you did: where it went well; where it went differently from how you planned.

Observer's report to observee

- Here's what I saw (Describe class meeting.)
- Here are examples of things (moments) that were effective.
- Here are examples of times where I did not understand what you were doing. Please explain it to me.
- Here are some ideas for what you might change.

Departmental Models/Plans for Peer Observation

See handouts

- Three models for Department-Sponsored Formative Assessment of Teaching
- Developing a Departmental Plan for Summative Use of Peer Observation

An Effective Peer Review Process...

- provides for both formative and summative feedback
- is attentive to thoroughness and fairness
- includes well-prepared peer reviewers
- inspires trust and confidence in all involved
- is always subject to improvement
- creates helpful collaborations
- is valued within the academic unit
- is executed with cooperation and timeliness

Resources for the Peer Observation Process

A brief, practical guide

ITLAL's (UAlbany) Peer Observation Resources and Guidelines:

<http://www.itlal.org/index.php?q=node/90>

A more comprehensive guide

Nancy Van Note Chism, *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing, 2007

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Questions?

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