A Class Visit Model Rick Holmgren Allegheny College

Class visitation as described in our model is intended to foster conversations among faculty that will lead to a deeper understanding of classroom dynamics and improved student learning. Since we recognize that techniques that are successful for one instructor in inspiring student learning are often unsuccessful for others, the goal of class observation is not to measure the instructor's classroom behaviors against some fixed criterion or the preferred classroom behaviors of the observer. Rather, the observer seeks to serve as a mirror reflecting classroom dynamics and providing insight to the instructor about how well the instructor is meeting the instructor's goals.

Structure It is best if colleagues exchange class visits so that each is asked to share his or her teaching with the other. Observing the classes of others is particularly helpful for formative teaching development, and exchanging visits can decrease the stress associated with summative evaluation. So that observations can be situated in an appropriate context, each classroom visit should be preceded and followed by conversations between the instructor and the observer. The observer's response to a class is typically multifaceted, and the observer's comments will be most helpful to the instructor if the observer focuses on topics that have been identified by the instructor in the pre- or post-observation.

Cross-Disciplinary Observations Observers from outside the discipline of the instructor are uniquely positioned to describe the students' experience in the classroom since they, like the students, are unlikely to be conversant with the nuances of the material. Colleagues who are not experts in the content area are more likely to notice topics or presentational details that cause difficulty for the novice. In extreme cases—I have observed classes conducted in languages I do not speak—the observer can provide useful commentary on student reaction: note-taking patterns, postures that indicate engagement or disengagement, eye contact or other sign of connection between the professor and students. In my experience, faculty observers from the humanities have provided insightful comments on the conduct of my courses in advanced mathematics.

The Pre-Observation Conversation The goal of the pre-observation discussion is to identify the instructor's learning goals for the students, her or his strategies for meeting those goals, and areas of concern to the instructor. Learning is more effective if the learner is motivated to learn the material, and a class observation will be more helpful if it focuses on issues of interest to the instructor. For example, if my intent is to create a learning environment that stimulates students to ask questions and then explore those questions with me (the instructor), then an observation report that details how I might present the material in a lecture format may not be as helpful as one that addresses the ways in which I facilitated the questioning and investigative process. To help the

observer focus on issues that are important to the instructor, the instructor should be encouraged to answer the following questions in the pre-observation discussion:

What is your teaching/learning philosophy? (Or, how do you describe your approach to facilitating student learning?) What are your learning goals for the students in this course? What are the learning goals for the class session to be observed? What will be happening in the class? Are you trying any instructional techniques in this class session that you have not used before? What do you see as your primary role in this class session (e.g., leading discussion, moderating a debate, organizing activities, presenting material)? What do you expect students to be doing in this class session (e.g., discussing, creating models, taking notes)? Is there anything in particular you would like the observer to be watching for in

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It is often helpful if the instructor shares a syllabus or other class materials with the observer. It also helps develop mutual trust if the observer answers some of these questions for his or her own courses during the conversation. A written summary of the learning goals, teaching strategies, and issues of particular interest can help focus the observation and provide a starting point for the post-observation discussion.

The Class Visit Before the class visit, the instructor prepares the stud

the material or situation, questions that come up for her or him, or other commentary. Ideally, responses are lined up across from the content moment during which they occurred. Some observers find it helpful to write the time in the left margin occasionally so that class events can be more easily located in the post-observation discussion. Often, the notes are given to the instructor during the post-observation discussion.

In general, the observer attempts to disturb the normal flow of the class as little as possible, which implies that the observer arrives a few minutes early to find a seat, stays for the whole class or until a class break, and refrains from speaking to students during class activities. The transition from a break to class is a particularly important period for setting the tone of a class and arriving early will provide the observer the opportunity to observe how the instructor manages this transition. Late arrivals or early departures are disruptive and send negative signals to the class about the perceived value of the class. In addition, although students are a good source of information about the class, the observer should refrain from talking with them about the class or the instructor to the students, and any feedback gathered in this manner is likely to be skewed by the small sample size and the tendency of students with similar attitudes to sit next to one another.

The Post-Observation Meeting The instructor and the observer should discuss the class as soon after the class as possible. Ideally, the discussion occurs immediately after the observed class session when the session is still fresh in both their minds. An early meeting also helps to relieve any anxiety related to the visit that is felt by the instructor.

The instructor begins the follow-up meeting by describing her or his experience of the class and asking for feedback on specific issues, after which the observer can share her or his observations and answer any questions raised by the instructor. Since unsolicited advice often provokes defensiveness and is seldom useful to the instructor, the observer should refrain from offering advice or solutions ("This is what I would do . . .") unless specifically asked to do so. The observer's role is to serve as a mirror or recorder for the instructor; the observer's role is *not* that of a teaching expert. The observer should bear in mind that students are often ill equipped to describe their experience in the classroom in a way that can help the instructor appreciate the triumphs and difficulties students experience. Consequently, the observer can usually best help the instructor by reflecting the student experience for the instructor, something an observer is often well equipped to do, especially when he or she is from outside the instructor's discipline. Information about the student experience can then become a resource for the instructor in shaping her or his courses. As a side benefit of this approach to consultation, the observer may find that she or he will develop an increased appreciation for the joys and challenges of her or his own students. Indeed, many faculty with experience in class observation report that they learn more about their own teaching from observing the he

This work has been substantially informed by consistences with Pater Freder (x of Wabash Infence Other resources include the following written works: heter behavesh Belinivers Teacheng Through Peer Classroom Observiseons Changenon Practices in Evalutive on Teacheng A Practical Guide to Improved Factors

Suggestions for Providing Helpful Feedback

Sample Feedback for a Class Observation	
Not so helpful feedback	More Helpful feedback
You really didn't create much enthusiasm.	It appeared to me that the students' energy levels began to sag when you were talking about
Your presentation of was very clear.	I understood best when you presented the example about
Your voice is too soft.	I found it very hard to hear your comments from where I was sitting.