

## Classroom Observations

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**Purpose:** Visiting the classrooms of your peers and students **is** an opportunity to learn and share Mandela teaching and learning, collaborate, reflect, share best practices, and support each other to live your shared commitments. It **is not** evaluative but rather an indispensable component of productive collaboration: Not only does the observed teacher have an opportunity to get concrete feedback, but also the observing teacher naturally reflects on her or his own practice and gets ideas from the observed teacher.

**Goal:** The leadership team is committed to the possibility that each teacher observe 2 – 4 teachers this spring for at least 20 minutes starting at the beginning of class.

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### Feedback Protocol: Give it with Care, Get Permission, Be Specific

#### Before the Observation

Ask the teacher what in particular they would like feedback on. Remind the teacher that this is not evaluative; rather it is an opportunity to share our practice, collaborate productively, ponder best practices, and support each other in living our school commitments.

#### Post-observation Dialogue: The Praise Sandwich

1. The observer begins by asking the teacher what he or she thought about the lesson. What went well? What went wrong? What could have been better? The observed teacher benefits from **self-reflection**. At this time, the teacher may also share any thoughts or feelings about the process and **make requests**—for example, “Please frame all of your cool feedback in the form of questions.”
2. The observer picks 2 –3 areas of **strength** and shares those strengths with the teacher—this is warm feedback. Use the observation tool as a guideline, but don’t be confined to it. Be very **concrete** and **specific**. For example,
  - a. “When you said X, students seemed to respond favorable because...”
  - b. “When you did activity X, students appeared engaged because they...”
  - c. “When you said X, it appeared to me that...”
3. Feedback is most effective when the receiver **invites** the comments. Therefore, the observer asks explicitly for **permission** to give cool feedback. It is important that the teacher be prepared for the feedback so that she or he can listen openly and without defense, and that the observer give the feedback with **care**. Consider the following:
  - a. “I would like to give you feedback on your specific request as well as some of the points mentioned in the observation tool. Are you ready?”
  - b. “Inside our commitment to do our best under challenging circumstances, I would like to ask some questions about your practice; can I do that now?”
  - c. “We are both committed to giving our students the best learning opportunities. I have some suggestions that could do just that. Are you ready for me to offer some suggestions?”
4. Provide 2 – 3 **suggestions** or **cool feedback**. Be **concrete** and **specific**! Good feedback deals clearly with particular incidents and behavior. Consider framing your cool feedback or suggestions as questions. Questions are both provocative and easy to hear. This section can be interactive, or the observer can give all the feedback at once and then allow the teacher to reflect on what she or he heard.

Suggestion	Question
I noticed you didn't communicate the standards or goals of the lesson to the students. Consider doing so at the beginning of class.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When and how do you address the goals of the lesson?</li> <li>• At what point in your lesson do students know the goals of the lesson?</li> </ul>
I noticed lots of paper and garbage on your floor. I recommend that you find a way to keep your room cleaner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the garbage on the floor impact the learning environment?</li> <li>• What message do you think the garbage on the floor sends to students about their learning?</li> </ul>
As I observed student behavior, I noticed that many students were not paying attention and talking off topic. It also seemed that the directions confused students. Consider working on being clearer with your directions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students were confused about what to do. Why do you think they were confused?</li> <li>• What specifically did students not understand?</li> <li>• How could your directions been clearer to the students?</li> </ul>

5. Next, the **teacher reflects** (or summarizes too) on the observer's comments, suggestions, and questions. What did you find helpful? Provocative? What would you like to probe further? How might the feedback impact your teaching practice?
  
6. Finally, the observer closes the feedback dialogue with **praise**. It remains important to acknowledge and recognize that teachers are doing their best and are committed to providing the best education for Mandela students. Acknowledge your good work and your commitment to getting better outcomes for your students.

### The Teacher Giving Feedback

- Give it with care.
- Let the recipient invite the feedback; get permission.
- Be specific about the behavior and your comments or questions.
- Speak for yourself only.
- Don't evaluate. The most useful feedback describes behaviors without value labels such as "irresponsible", "unprofessional", or even "good" and "bad". If the recipient asks you to make a judgment, be sure to state clearly that this is *your* opinion.
- Help the receiver figure out how to act on your feedback.

### The Teacher Receiving Feedback

- Be specific about the feedback that you want.
- Be open to the feedback. Listen carefully and with discipline—avoid defending or justifying your behavior.
- Clarify and check your understanding of the feedback. You need to get clear feedback in order for it to be helpful. Ask for specific examples, e.g. "Can you describe what I do or say that makes me appear aggressive to you?"
- Summarize your understanding of the feedback.
- Share your reaction to the feedback.
- Think about how the feedback can impact your practice. Is there something you can take away