

Classroom Observation Cycle: Structures and Supports at MS 331

Stephen Monaco: The role observations play here in M.S.331 is crucial. We'll observe each teacher three times throughout the year, if not more, and we'll provide them regular descriptive feedback, probably twenty times throughout the year in a non-evaluative process. So we kind of broke down the wall of "when an administrator's in my room, it's purely evaluative" and there's this tension. You know I have to put on a show for my administrator who might see two or three times in a year.

Serapha Cruz: The observation process includes a lot of different components. So first of all we have formal observations, then we have another system for informal observations and then we have just regular feedback. Formal observations and informal observations both go into teachers' files and are also used as part of the summative evaluation process. Feedback is meant to be more developmental and that's where we go and observe in shorter periods of time and give feedback but it's not for anyone's file or for their overall evaluation. We like to do a lot more informal observations because we feel like we get a more genuine snapshot of what's going on in the classroom.

Drew Remiker: I notice there are three blacks out of ten. So who can tell me what percent would that be?
Michael, yes?

Michael: 0.3%.

Drew Remiker: So you say 0.3? Remember that's the decimal, we got to multiply it by a hundred and John what will we get?

John: 30.

Drew Remiker: Good. 30%.

Serapha Cruz: We've been using Charlotte Danielson's [Framework for Teaching](#) for three years. It allowed us to really focus our feedback with teachers around very specific elements of teaching.

Stephen Monaco: Teachers have an opportunity to evaluate themselves and speak to the different components within the Danielson Rubric. And then we can have very authentic and targeted conversations about improving their practice. And with this structure and rubric, there's a common language.

Serapha Cruz: If you were going to teach this lesson again, are there any kind of changes that you think you would make, not only instructionally, but in any of the other domains, like around planning or environment or anything else?

Drew Remiker: One thing I might have change is to not allow the...

Serapha Cruz: Originally we started to use the framework as a way to make sure that our tenure decisions were made in a meaningful way. We wanted to setup a tenure process that was both developmental and also evaluative. We also believe that we should create some sort of developmental continuum. So a year one teacher shouldn't be held to the same standard as a year three or beyond teacher. So we decided which elements of Danielson we thought were crucial for a first year teacher to master and that all of our work with first year teachers would revolve around those specific elements. And there are only nine of them within the twenty two. And then a second year teacher then has more components that they're responsible for and then a third year teacher by the time they're up for tenure is responsible for all twenty two.

Our original work was just exposing teachers to the framework and helping them to internalize it. We did that by having professional development where we would take one component and say what kinds of evidence could you look for in a classroom to see that it was proficient in this particular component.

Rather than us telling teachers we had them develop and brainstorm like charts of what would you see in a classroom. We had so many new teachers, we wanted to make sure that they understood what our expectations were and what did good teaching look like. And we wanted to be very specific about it.

Drew Remiker: How many of you calculated both the theoretical and experimental probabilities? Was there anyone able to do that? You can base tenure decisions on test scores or you know other professional responsibilities but to really understand what a teacher does, I think you need to be in the room and you need to see them in action.

Serapha Cruz: There have been several challenges over the last three years of implementing this that we've encountered. First and foremost was that it was more around administrator effectiveness than

teacher effectiveness originally. We needed to make sure that our instructional cabinet, myself and two assistant principals, internalize the rubric well enough to use it. So we have to be able to walk in to a classroom and be on the same page as an instructional cabinet about what proficiency looks like.

You have for all of pretty much domain one proficient. So when you came to the lesson with this lesson plan, you felt like those elements were proficient or do they become proficient through your conversation with him?

Stephen Monaco: There were some minor details that we worked through where he would go from basic to proficient.

Serapha Cruz: If you feel that he didn't come to the observation with it narrowed and specific, that in domain one that rather giving him a proficient that he has a basic, because he didn't come with that. He's doing that now that you've coached him on how to change that.

One of the things that we do as administrative team is we divide our days into coaching days and to office days. On coaching days you're never in your office until an assigned part of the time at the end of the day or maybe at the beginning of the day. The rest of the day you're doing exactly that. You're out coaching. So you're in classrooms, you're having conversations with teachers about how to be better practitioners. On office days you're doing all the things that keep you from being effective on coaching days. So you're taking care of the sort of managerial things that have to also be done to run a school effectively.

There are many things that need to be in place in order for this to be successful at any school. At our school we have a two week institute before school begins for any new teachers to our building and that's not just new teachers to the profession because what we found is teachers who transfer here from other schools, even if they have experience, they haven't been exposed to a framework like Danielson.

We also have at the very beginning of the year, September and October, goal setting meetings with every teacher. Each teacher meets with the supervisor for their department and sets a goal. Then we start our formal observation process and we have a yearlong schedule for observations.

In December and January, we have a mid-year conversation with all teachers. And this structure really allows us to make sure that everyone is on the same page, everyone understands exactly how we perceive and assess them at that point in the year. Any teachers that are struggling at that point in the year, I'll put

on a teacher improvement plan, which really is very direct and specific about what items need to be improved and by what time. If they're not meeting your expectations or they're not doing well on the rubric, they're supported and there's target intervention.

All of our teachers that are up for tenure begin a process at the very beginning of the year where we'd let them know that we'll be doing more observations of them than any other teachers. And we are in their classrooms a lot giving them both informal and formal observations between October and March.

And all of those teachers who are also putting together professional binder around domain one and domain four for planning and preparation, and also professional responsibilities, and in April we have a conversation with them that sort of like defending a thesis. You're defending to a panel why you should be granted tenure. And we really include their documents for domains one and four and then all of our observations around domain two and domain three.

I think it's just part of our philosophy and our vision here is that this is really about honing the craft. This is a profession like being a doctor is a profession. And this is what good practice looks like. And we should know that for teaching just like we do for medicine. And one would expect that you walk into a surgery and just hope it goes well. We walk into teaching the same way, what is good practice? It's not about your personality, it's not about you know all of these kind of extraneous things. It's about, there's something very specific that good practitioners do and these are the components and if you master these components, you're going to be a good teacher regardless of your personality.