

ONE FORMAL OBSERVATION – A GROWTH-PROMOTING APPROACH

Three important points need to be kept in mind when discussing how to include one formal, in-class observation in teacher evaluation: (1) the primary purpose of evaluation is to promote growth of practice, (2) there is no way to collect enough evidence for every indicator in every domain of a teaching framework rubric in one formal observation, and (3) one has to question why, if a teacher has already been deemed at least Proficient according to any given indicator, the evaluator would have to continue to gather evidence and deem that teacher Proficient in that area over and over again. How, then, can that formal observation be used more effectively?

One practice for Professional Development and Evaluation Committees to discuss and consider is to have the teacher and evaluator mutually agree, during the goal-setting conference, on which indicator(s) will be the focus of the formal observation. The 2014 revision to the CCT Rubric includes the following domains and indicators for use in in-class observations (other frameworks will vary):

Domain 2 : *Classroom Environment, Student Engagement and Commitment to Learning*

Indicators :

- 2.a. Creating a class climate that is responsive to and respectful of learning needs of all students.
- 2.b. Promoting developmentally appropriate standards of behavior that support a productive learning environment for all students.
- 2.c. Maximizing instructional time by effectively managing routines and transitions.

Domain 4 : *Instruction for Active Learning*

Indicators :

- 4.a. Implementing instructional content for learning.
- 4.b. Leading students to construct meaning and apply new learning through the use of active learning strategies.
- 4.c. Monitoring student learning, providing feedback to students and adjusting instruction.

If the teacher and evaluator can mutually agree on which indicator(s) will be the teacher's practice focus for the year, and agree that the evaluation rating will be based on the *progress* the teacher makes in reaching the goal, the process is driven by reflection, an opportunity to try new strategies in the classroom, and more focused feedback. That is a true growth model.

Let's look at this through an example. Jane Sample's 7th grade students will be working all year on providing supporting evidence for positions they take on content-related issues. Ms. Sample also knows that her students need to work on their oral speaking and presentation skills, so wants to learn and teach her students to use a greater variety of such skills. She and her evaluator agree that her formal observation will focus on Indicator 2a : *Creating a class climate that is responsive to and respectful of learning needs of all students*, and Indicator 4.b. *Leading students to construct meaning and apply new learning through the use of active learning strategies*. How will this be used in the evaluation process?

Goal-setting conference : Ms. Sample and her evaluator agree on the indicators used, which link to the student growth goal of using supporting evidence more effectively to take a position on a content-related issue. Ms. Sample provides her evaluator with some details of what oral skills they will work on, and what their current level of proficiency is. They agree that the evaluator's evidence for the indicators will be collected during the formal observation, and that Ms. Sample will provide some evidence to discuss in the mid-year conference, and some additional evidence to discuss during the year end conference that was collected after the formal observation and post conference took place.

Mid year conference : Ms. Sample and her evaluator discuss the progress her students are making in reaching the goal, as well as what Ms. Sample has done to teach them the skills. Ms. Sample gives her evaluator examples of how using the oral skills has enhanced students' understanding of the content.

Formal, in-class observation : Through the pre-observation form and/or conference, Ms. Sample gives her evaluator details about what the class will focus on, and how this connects to previous lessons and the goals set. The evaluator collects only evidence during the formal observation that aligns with the two indicators they agreed to use. Because the focus is more narrow, the evaluator is able to collect more, and more rich, data. During the post-observation conference, Ms. Sample and her evaluator discuss the evidence collected, and the evaluator poses several questions that prompt Ms. Sample to think about how she's teaching the students the oral skills. Ms. Sample uses this feedback to make some slight changes in her teaching strategies.

Year End Conference : Ms. Sample and her evaluator meet and look holistically at all the evidence they have collected during the year. The evidence Ms. Sample collected before the mid-year conference and after the formal observation post conference ‘fill in the gaps’ that help the evaluator determine her progress in meeting the indicator standards.

There are, of course, questions that arise about this practice.

1. How will an evaluator continue to know that a teacher is at least Proficient as described by the indicators in domains 2 & 5 if s/he doesn’t collect evidence for every indicator during the formal observation, especially since a formal observation might be done once every 3rd year?

When an evaluator conducts the three informal observations in other years, he can decide to do a formal observation if he sees practice that he feels might not meet the Proficient description. The flexibility to do additional formal observations can trigger this, without adding the burden of formal observations being required when they’re not necessary.

2. The teacher still has to collect evidence to give to the evaluator...isn’t this burdensome?

The teacher will collect a lot less evidence with this model than she would if the evaluator had to have evidence for every indicator in every domain. That’s one of the problems with a model that requires evidence for all indicators when the evaluator has the flexibility to do just one formal observation. The evidence the teacher collects should be found within what the teacher is already doing to plan and implement instruction. The evaluator should be able to make a well-informed decision using what he collects from the formal observation and no more than 4-5 pieces of evidence for each indicator that the teacher has collected over the course of the year.

3. How do the teacher and evaluator look at the evidence holistically?

In a holistic approach, you look at evidence for patterns of, and trends in, behavior. Evidence of ‘progress’ in meeting a standard means that the behavior shown is changing over time, or is being maintained if the starting behavior is already at a high level, and ‘matches’ the descriptor of the indicator.

Indicator	Below Standard	Developing	Proficient	Exemplary
2.a. Creating a positive learning environment that is responsive to & respectful of the learning needs of students. Attributes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapport & positive interaction. • Respectful of student diversity. 	Demonstrating negative interactions or lack of interactions between teacher and students. Demonstrating disrespect toward the diversity of students & their learning needs.	Establishing rapport and positive interaction with some but not all students. Establishing a learning environment that is respectful of students’ cultural and developmental differences but does not reinforce respect for diversity among students.	Maintaining rapport & positive interactions with students & promoting expectations that they are respectful of one another. Maintaining a learning environment that is respectful of students’ cultural & developmental differences & reinforces expectations that students are respectful of one another’s differences.	<i>In addition to the characteristics of proficient:</i> Involving learners in promoting a respectful learning environment. Using & incorporating the diversity of students’ differences to enrich learning opportunities.

4. How is the teacher rated?

In a holistic approach, the final ‘rating’ is based on the preponderance of evidence, or what the most significant, substantive evidence ‘says.’ The evaluator examines the evidence and asks him/herself which pieces of evidence have the greatest priority/weight, with what frequency the behaviors demonstrated by that evidence occur, and whether or not that evidence is supported by the other evidence collected. There are no numbers used.

5. What other benefits does this approach bring?

The indicators or practice can and should be chosen so that they support what the teacher’s student growth goal is. The review of practice done during the year can be the vehicle for additional evidence of practice that links to the indicators and student goal. This also promotes a professional growth plan that supports the entire process. In the end, it helps create a focus that is meaningful for the teacher by promoting reflection and growth, and linking that to desired student outcomes.