

Reflective Essay on Observation Theme

My dual goals for this assignment were to adhere to the forms and process given but also to adapt them if possible to the needs of an online school with a geographically dispersed faculty. When selecting a teacher to approach about working with me on this exercise, I chose social studies teacher Ana M.—because she has good professional boundaries, is committed to improving her practice, and is a member of the MNOHS Professional Development Committee. I explained to her that this was only an exercise, not in any way connected to the performance evaluation system that MNOHS currently has in place—but also that whatever we learned from the exercise might eventually inform a redesign of the current system.

The instructional model at MNOHS is mainly asynchronous. Teachers are required to hold synchronous office hours in Elluminate (the school webinar) three hours per week spread across two or more non-sequential days, and to arrange special meetings if students have scheduling conflicts and can't make the posted hours. Some teachers, including Ana, also hold instructional meetings in Elluminate but this is left up to their discretion. Ana holds a weekly one-hour meeting for each of her classes. Students must attend a minimum of two per quarter; they can also meet this requirement asynchronously by watching two recorded meetings and answering questions about them. Ana and I agreed, based on my scheduling needs, that I would attend her U.S. History meeting in Week 10.

My first departure from the given process was to conduct all the pre-observation (planning) steps via email, which is my normal daily mode of communication with MNOHS faculty. Given that nothing very controversial is expected to happen in this part of the process, I would probably repeat this choice even under non-simulated conditions. In other words, unless they wanted it, I wouldn't ask faculty to meet with me synchronously before an observation, only after.

A second departure was that I filled in as much of the Pre-Observation (Planning) Conference Form as I could on my own, using information from Ana's U.S. History course and from the school's student information system (SIS), before sending it on to Ana to fill in the rest. I would likely repeat this choice under non-simulated conditions as well, as it provided a valuable opportunity to see how the course navigation was working from the student view, and Ana also welcomed this. I do "pop in" to courses quite frequently, usually in the context of answering faculty members' requests for tech support. However, because my Executive Director

and I have agreed that another staff member will take over the tech part of my job in December, I have been pondering other “reasons” to pop in to courses. I found that the questions on the Pre-Observation (Planning) Conference Form created a useful and efficient structure for learning as much as I could about Ana’s U.S. History course in a limited time. I also appreciated that, in keeping with principles of adult learning, the form asked about which components she wanted to focus on. Her concerns, my observations and comments, and the goals we agreed on together all aligned with one another, which is what I would expect when going through this process with a committed professional.

Because this pre-observation (planning) step was conducted by email, I chose to write only positive statements—that is, to comment only on the information I found in the course and where (please see passages marked ‘Principal’ in the planning form below). I also kept notes about what I *didn’t* find (i.e. where course navigation was a bit rocky from the student view) to discuss with Ana in our post-observation conference.

I found the Classroom Observation Form very difficult to use! Reading the form in advance of observing Ana’s class meeting did help me to tune into the Danielson components, but actually writing on it was not a success for me. Perhaps with more practice I will become quicker. I experimented with the form in a couple of staff meetings and found that pausing to decide *where* to script each observation caused me to miss too much. For observing Ana, I made a two column form where I could simply (and quickly) record the time on the webinar clock and my observation (see below). I intended to backtrack and fill in the Classroom Observation Form, but this would have duplicated the work on the Classroom Observation Analysis Form, so I decided to go forward instead.

The Classroom Observation Analysis Form was very helpful as were the Danielson rubrics. I found this section useful and easy to complete with a high level of specificity which any adult learner needs and deserves. When speaking with Ana, it was helpful to remind her that the Danielson rubrics applied to this one observation, not to her teaching practice overall.

The questions on the Post-Observation (Reflection) Form worked very well. I emailed them to Ana in advance of our conference, and used them as the starting point for our conversation. As mentioned above, her concerns and mine were in perfect alignment. I took notes on the form as she spoke and then read my notes to her, relating my comments to her own wherever possible. Later I emailed my notes to her. She is an easy case but I think the overall

process would be beneficial even for teachers who might be skeptical about being observed. It gives them ownership by allowing them to set the direction of both the observation and the conference.

In terms of goal setting, Ana agreed with my suggestion that she attend a series of three one-hour moderator trainings offered by Elluminate. I myself have attended only one of the three, plus an administrator training—both of which were very well planned and delivered. Most of the skills she is currently using were taught in the first moderator training (and she may have picked them up from me in meetings), so I'm confident that the second and third trainings will help her to develop additional strategies for involving students in webinar meetings. As a result of our discussion, I'll plan to attend the second and third moderator trainings in December as well.

To improve her questioning techniques, Ana will review materials from a training she attended a couple of years ago and more deliberately follow through on what she learned there. This approach is consistent with principles of adult learning and also with my approach to supervising teachers. They are the content area experts; I do my best to stay informed but also count on them to identify any new tools and strategies that may be of interest.

I would definitely use this entire process and set of forms in a bricks-and-mortar school. For MNOHS, I will need to invent something else as synchronous meetings are only a small part of what we do. This experience has reconfirmed my appreciation for the Danielson book, and especially for the rubrics she has developed. It has also served as an important reminder that even the best MNOHS teachers (including myself) need to keep working on our skills in using the new tools we have adopted.

Interview Protocol for a Pre-observation (Planning) Conference Form

Name of Teacher Ana M. School MNOHS Date 11/15/10

Name of Principal Form completed by email

1. To which part of your curriculum does this lesson relate?

Principal: This is Week 10 of U.S. History A, “The Union in Peril.” The week's readings and activities focus on the events leading up to the Civil War. (Found in the top-level description of the Week 10 folder.)

2. How does this learning “fit” in the sequence of learning for this class?

Principal: In terms of content, this is part of a chronological sequence that starts with the Native American presence on the continent and the advent of Colonization and stretches through the Gilded Age. U.S. History B picks up where A leaves off. (Found by looking at the two main content links and also the course syllabus.)

In terms of process this is a non-mandatory weekly Elluminate meeting that students can attend to get an overview of the weekly assignments, ask questions, and get to know their classmates. (Found on the announcements page.)

3. Briefly describe the students in this class, including those with special needs.

Principal: Thirty-three students enrolled in Part 2 of the course (Weeks 9-16), six of whom are also enrolled in Part 1 (Weeks 1-8). Of the thirty-three enrolled, eleven have IEPs. (Found in Infinite Campus.)

Twenty eight students have logged on in the past week. (Found in the Bb grade center.)

Teacher: There are typically about seven students who show up regularly for the weekly meetings – four of them attend every week (or did during Quarter 1). One of the regular attendees has an IEP. The average grade for students who show up regularly is a B-. Most students who attend use the chat function to communicate rather than their headsets

4. What are your learning outcomes for this lesson? What do you want the students to understand?

Principal: Learning outcomes for this week (found in the top-level description of the Week 10 folder):

- Summarize the conflict in reaching consensus with the Compromise of 1850.
- Assess the results of the election of 1860.
- Define and analyze the concept of popular sovereignty.
- Identify and categorize natural ingredients in favorite food choice

Teacher: One additional outcome is to describe and draw food ingredients in natural state and natural environment

5. How will you engage the students in the learning? What will you do? What will the students do? Will the students work in groups, or individually, or as a large group? Provide any worksheets or other materials the students will be using.

Teacher: I will share a quote with students and ask them to discuss the quote – the objective is to understand the concept of popular sovereignty and analyze the implication of applying it to the specific case of slavery. Students will discuss as a large group – probably through the chat function. Students will also write on the whiteboard when we discuss how to complete the charts for their History of Food project.

6. How will you differentiate instruction for different individuals or groups of students in the class?

Principal: I know that the course has been modified for some students with IEPs—both in terms of content/assignments and in terms of pace. What differentiation are you able to work in for other students who are engaging with the standard assignments at the standard pace?

Teacher: Students choose their topic for the History of Food project – and they will choose which elements to include in the Natural Ingredients Research chart. One of the assignments this week asks for a summary of events in Kansas – students can either submit a pictorial summary or a written summary. There are also two optional assignments – one is defining popular sovereignty, the other is an honors assignment contrasting two perspectives on the constitutionality of slavery.

7. How and when will you know whether the students have learned what you intend?

Teacher: When they submit their written assignments for the week and I read them. Also, as the discussion progresses, I can generally tell which students understand the concept we are discussing by sticking to the topic or participating in a way that demonstrates their understanding.

8. What Components from our district's Framework for Teaching should I pay particular attention to during my visit to your classroom?

Principal: Framework for Teaching is the Charlotte Danielson system; I'm attaching a screenshot from a webinar which shows her four main domains. In this observation I will be focusing on the ten components listed on the following page, so this is asking which of the ten components listed you want me to pay particular attention to.

Teacher: 3b – Discussion and Questioning Techniques, 3c – Engaging Students, and 3d - Using Assessment in Instruction

Classroom Observation Form

Directions for completing this form: Script-tape what you see and hear during the classroom observation. Record what the teacher is saying and what you observe students doing. Record facts. Avoid recording inferences and judgments.

Name Ana M. **School** MNOHS

Grade Level 10-12 **Subject/Class** U.S. History A

Observer Name **Date** 11/18/10 **Time** 1:00-2:00 p.m.

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

Domain 3: Instruction

2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport Please see next page.	3a: Communicating with Students Please see next page.
2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning Please see next page.	3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques Please see next page.
2c: Managing Classroom Procedures Please see next page.	3c: Engaging Students in Learning Please see next page.
2d: Managing Student Behavior Please see next page.	3d: Using Assessment in Instruction Please see next page.
2e: Organizing Physical Space Please see next page.	3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness Please see next page.

Classroom Observation Form

Name Ana M. School MNOHS

Grade Level 10-12 Subject/Class U.S. History A

Observer Name _____ Date 11/18/10 Time 1:00-2:00 p.m.

Time	Observation
0:00-1:50	AM welcomes group and explains intro slide with class business and purpose of the meeting. AM: Remember you can come as many times as you like. I think it helps you to understand the assignments. I'm glad that some of you are coming regularly; please keep coming back.
1:50	AM asks question about whether students have reviewed the materials. Says it's fine if they haven't as this is an intro to the week. 2/4 answer. Intro lecture to week's work with three maps.
6:47	AM asks question about what popular sovereignty means. 2/4 answer. No clear understanding. Fifth student joins.
8:40	AM gave partial definition, now asks students to fill in. HB fills in.
10:20	AM gives formal definition. Asks if it makes sense. Some students check yes.
12:00	AM shows Douglas quote and polls students about whether they agree. Yes = 0. No = 2. Not sure = 3. Poll is not anonymous.
13:26	AM asks why some students disagreed. Hannah and Anthony give some reasons in the chat.
15:14	AM asks students to clarify what types of decisions should be federal ones. Anthony: Slavery. AM: Any others? Hannah: Taxes. Anthony: Choosing our government or leaders. Anything major. AM: Are there issues that can be left to states? Anthony: Yes. AM: Which ones? Anthony: Driving and roads. Only Hannah and Anthony active. LP, MY, SB not active.
18:00	AM: Others? AC: Age restrictions. AM: Asks for clarification.
20:00	Summarized and conducted poll to check for agreement w/Douglas quote.
21:00	AM: Why is slavery an issue for the whole country?
24:00	AM: Popular sovereignty
25:00	Only AC and HB making contributions
26:00	AM: What would happen if...?
27:00	AC and HB: Discussion of drinking age and how this is discrimination
29:00	AM: So the law is legit but a group thinks it is discriminating
30:00	AM: Given that laws can hurt people, should there be limits on popular sovereignty?
31:00	HB makes comment on police arresting runaways. What if they left an abusive home? AM: So the law could be putting them back in harm's way... AC makes comment about states
32:00	AM uses AC's comments about states to segue back to map.
35:00	AM tells stories about the northern states pushing people to claim land in Kansas and people crossing the border to vote. AM: You'll read about bleeding Kansas.
38:00	AM polls class again about the Douglas quote and about whether they have changed their opinion.
41:00	AM: Here's why we're talking about this... This week you'll write your own quote.
43:00	AM introduces food project and continues explanation while answering a question from SB

	about the project. Slide: Even yummy things have a history. HB says she has to leave; LP says goodbye.
45:00	AM explains what animals, plants, mineral products are.
47:00	AM shows label and asks students to highlight. Instructions don't seem clear. AC asks.
48:00	AM tells them what goes into each category.
50:00	LP leaves.
52:00	MY asks question about what they will produce.
54:00	AM checks for understanding.
56:00	Students: bye. Moderator bye. Two have left without saying.

Classroom Observation Analysis Form

Directions for completing this form: Take the scripted notes from the Classroom Observation Form and place them by the appropriate Component. Locate the Element that best corresponds with your documentation (scripted notes) and put the name of that Element in the box. Review your documentation to determine what level of performance was observed during the observation and put the level in the box under Level of Performance. An example has been provided for 2d: Managing Student Behavior

Component	Scripted Notes from Observation	Element	Level of Performance
2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport	AM: I'm glad that some of you are coming regularly; please keep coming back. AM accepts answers given by HB and AC.	Teacher interaction with students.	Proficient
2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning	AM explains why this meeting will help them with their assignments for the week.	Expectations for learning and achievement.	Proficient/Distinguished
2c: Managing Classroom Procedures	AM transitions from one topic to another smoothly and does not stop for student entrances and exits.	Management of transitions	Proficient
2d: Managing Student Behavior	Students stay on topic throughout. Participation is uneven.	Monitoring of student behavior	Basic/Proficient
2e: Organizing Physical Space	Slides throughout are well made and enhance learning. Polls used several times. Little use of whiteboard by students.	Arrangement of furniture and use of physical resources (Use of Elluminate tools and resources)	Proficient
3a: Communicating with Students	AM explains the maps and the concept of popular sovereignty	Explanations of content	Proficient/Distinguished
3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques	Only two students are active in discussion.	Student participation	Basic
3c: Engaging Students in Learning	Agenda for meeting shown in first slide. Pacing correct. Closure somewhat rushed or lost by students leaving early.	Structure and pacing	Proficient/Distinguished
3d: Using Assessment in Instruction	Polls and checks for understanding used. Students could have been more active in the discussion and also in the animal/plant/mineral section.	Monitoring of student learning	Basic/Proficient

3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness	AM speaks and texts simultaneously! Also, gets input from students and uses what they say to segue to next part of the agenda.	Response to students	Proficient
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Interview Protocol for a Post-observation (Reflection) Conference

Directions for completing this form: Use effective questioning techniques to guide your discussion with the teacher. When appropriate, bring in the information from the Classroom Observation Analysis Form and discuss what you saw and heard during the observation. Incorporate the language from the various levels of proficiency in the framework with the teacher. Be prepared to share suggestions for improvement if the teacher is unable to do so.

Name of Teacher AM School MNOHS Date 11/22/10

Name of Principal _____

1. In general, how successful was the lesson? Did the students learn what you intended for them to learn? How do you know?

Teacher: It was fairly successful. I was trying to do Paideia-type questioning where they run with a question, but they went in an unexpected direction. It was an okay direction too, and also related to U.S. History. Their submitted assignments indicate that they did get it—even the students who didn't attend the session but did watch the recording. I don't think the final part—the food history project discussions—had any impact on the quality of their work.

2. If you were able to bring some samples of student work, what do those samples reveal about those students' levels of engagement and understanding?

Teacher: Some students are actually submitting a quotation (sound bite), as assigned. Others are submitting an opinion, which is okay but not exactly what was assigned.

3. Comment on your classroom procedures, student conduct, and your use of physical space. To what extent did these contribute to student learning?

Teacher: Physical space is the white board and other tools in Elluminate. I try to ask them to be active. All of the students did respond to the polls. Sometimes there will be irrelevant chat but that didn't happen this time. (When it does happen, I will send a chat message to some or to all. I try not to stop it vocally unless sending a message doesn't work.) Only two of the five students were active. It's hard to know what the other three got out of it while we were in the meeting but the quality of their assignments is good. I miss the noisiness of a classroom. They are all very polite.

4. Did you depart from your plan? If so, how and why?

Teacher: Before the class started I departed from my original plan. I wanted to do it as a concept attainment lesson, but wasn't sure how to get there because it was so foreign to them. Instead I gave the definition. There were no departures once the class was under way.

5. Comment on different aspects of your instructional delivery (e.g., activities, grouping of students, materials, and resources). To what extent were they effective?

Teacher: In the History of Food part, when we were highlighting ingredients, I could have assigned who highlighted what products—to know who was engaged. However, some students prefer anonymity and I can see from lit pens in Elluminate who is writing. I could have done think-pair-share—but Elluminate breakout rooms are harder logistically than turn to your neighbor.

6. If you had a chance to teach this lesson again to the same group of students, what would you do differently?

Teacher: I would try think-pair-share breakout rooms to see how it works. I would think more in advance about where else the discussion would go so that I am better prepared with examples that meet the students where they are.

7. Here are my observations about what I saw and heard in your classroom during my observation.

Principal: Your slides and presentation were very well organized, your timing excellent, and your storytelling engaging. I think you missed an opportunity to pose questions that students otherwise wouldn't think of—for example, whether minority rights should be subject to majority voting. You let them talk about what matters to them as teenagers, which is great; I would have liked to see you build a bridge back to what matters in history.

I noticed that one student who was very quiet did say goodbye in the chat when another student left and that students asked about aspects of the assignment that they didn't understand—so they are paying attention. Even so, I think it's important to do pair chatting or pair breakout rooms (even with such a small group), or to find/invent other ways to make every student's voice and opinion count.

You answered your own question about animal/plant/mineral products, which to me was a missed opportunity to get the students active. It seemed that you wanted to go quickly in that section, and maybe the topic is very easy for them—but this might indicate that you could cut it and spend more time on the harder topic (popular sovereignty).

Regarding navigation in the course, I think students might miss the quarterly project or at least miss the fact that there is a little piece of it to work on each week. This needs to be stated in your syllabus and in my opinion it would be beneficial to put a reminder in the weekly folders as well. Likewise, your notice about the two required synchronous meetings per quarter is too buried—this needs to be added to the syllabus and repeated whenever you link to the meeting room. Your make-up questions are excellent; it's clear that they can't succeed unless they watch the recording.

Individual Professional Growth Plan

Directions for completing this form: Use the information from the Post-observation (Reflection) Conference and collaborate with the teacher on determining a goal that he or she would like to reach in order to improve his or her effectiveness in the classroom. The goal should be directly related to an area of needed growth that was identified during your observation or the Post-observation (Reflection) Conference with the teacher.

Name of Teacher Ana M. School MNOHS

Framework for Teaching Domain Instruction

Component 3B. Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques (Student participation)

Describe your goal and reasons for choosing it.

Ana will work on making her questioning and discussions in synchronous class meetings more effective. This includes:

1. better planning – more deliberate wording of questions and more forethought about possible directions the discussion could take, and
2. more effective use of Elluminate to involve all students.

Outline your plan to achieve this goal.

Ana has never attended Elluminate training for moderators; she is pretty much self-taught. She will attend all three free online one-hour sessions. She took a Paideia Institute training a couple of summers ago at Augsburg College and has the resources she needs to work on more deliberate question/discussion planning. She will review those training materials and devote more time to planning.

List the support or resources you need to achieve this goal.

The link to the Elluminate training page is in Teaching Online.

How will you know the goal was successfully completed?

Ana will apply more deliberate questioning techniques in upcoming class meetings. She will report to Elissa about how this affects the course of class discussions. After attending all three Elluminate moderator trainings she will also report on any new strategies she is implementing and the impact they have on student participation in her class meetings.

Teacher's Signature _____ Date 11/22/10

Principal's Signature _____ Date 11/22/10