

## Disguised example of observation feedback - Language Arts

*In most schools, new teachers receive hardly any feedback after they start teaching. Not so at LePort: we believe that even the best teachers can improve by getting regular, targeted feedback. That's why our academic leadership team observes frequently in our classes: this feedback is written by Jane Erickson, the Executive Director who oversees our Upper Elementary and Junior High program at all LePort campuses. The goal here is not to collect materials to complete performance reviews, but to provide concrete, specific guidance on how our teachers can become better, every day.*

*Ask yourself as you read this: How would it make you feel to know that your child's teacher was getting this level of feedback to help him grow? Given this "growth mindset" feedback this teacher received, will he be more or less likely to take a similarly encouraging, supportive, yet positively challenging attitude toward his own students?*

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## Observation Notes and Teacher Feedback

### Independent Reading

- When I came in the room, the students were already doing their independent reading.
- Most students sitting in their desks, a few on the rug, and four boys at the table. Just curious: do they decide where they want to read? Do they rotate the table and rug?
- Two of the boys sitting at the round table. At one point, one was looking at pictures in the other's big book. Was only a momentary distraction.
- All students reading quietly.
- Teacher talks to a couple students during this time. Whispers very quietly so you can barely even tell that a conversation is going on. Not distracting to other students at all! 😊 Curious what's being discussed. Teacher reads her own book for second half of reading time.
- Used alarm on phone to signal when reading time is up. Very clear signal for the students! When alarm went off, students quietly went back to seat. A couple took a minute to finish up where they're at.
- Asked if two students want to share their reading today. Students weren't giving substantive answers (e.g., "It was cool."). Not all the students were listening to what the student was saying. Seems that the purpose of the sharing is about the student telling the teacher what happened, but no other student has the context, so it didn't seem very productive. All the other students aren't getting anything out of it, so probably better to keep sharing to conference time or a more in depth discussion among peers. Otherwise it seems like sharing for "sharing sake".

### Grammar Sightings

- One student had a "grammar sighting."
- Need more energy in here; everyone seems like they're paying attention but kind of has a flat overtone and many expressionless faces.
- Other students have hands in the air while the first student is talking. Need signal to put hand down while another student is talking. Might need to say it a few times to start: "Your friend is talking, so why are you raising your hand?" "I'm not going to call on another student until your peers who's speaking now is finished." Then you can just use a hand signal. The students with their hands raised aren't going to be listening to who's talking; they're thinking about what they want to say. And it's rude to whomever is speaking.

- One student fiddling with nametag on desk. Teacher sees him and uses proximity to get him to stop. Why is his ruler on his desk? He's not listening.
- These stories again are being shared primarily for the teacher, not for the class. Doesn't seem like they're going to be memorable for other students. Four students shared.
- One girl got up and got some piece of paper from her bin. Put it in her book and put book in desk. Teacher aware of it and again uses proximity to engage her. It works.
- "Okay, one more...!" Good to give students a signal that you're only taking one more volunteer! Sets the expectation up in advance so they're not disappointed when you don't call on them after this last student.
- There's something good about sharing these grammar sightings because it's reinforcing them looking out into the world for these things. But it doesn't seem as productive or as exciting as it could be. Too many examples that aren't great; one powerful example would be better. Maybe assign a grammar sighting to one student a week, and have them present it to the class more formally? Have them write it down on the board and have the class identify *why* it's wrong. Why do they think it happened? How would it be correct? Would make it more exciting, get more engagement, and give it more depth. I also have the sense (although I could totally be wrong!) that it's probably the same students who want to share these over and over; the more observant ones. We need to get the other ones looking out into the world, too, so assigning this may be better.

### Dress-up Corrections - Collect

- Teacher has students find something in homework binder and turn in.
- Three students get up to staple; should be stapled before class or get supply notice.
- Tip: could have them get all work to be turned in on their desk before being dismissed for lunch so you can collect it before class. Saves housekeeping time. I did this last year with their math, and it worked wonderfully (after some practice, of course). Really saved time!
- One student keeps reading throughout all of this. Reading Steve Job's biography? Not paying attention to what's going on.
- What should students be doing as you're collecting papers? Most are just sitting there waiting. When planning transitions, housekeeping, etc., always think: "What should the *students* be doing?" Make sure there's always an answer. ☺

### Hand back Homework

- Asked how feel about compound elements homework. Good to get their evaluation! Have them think back to the completion of the assignment that's being returned; put them back into that context.
- Passed back. Lots of waiting around as hand back work. It would probably be better if you hand everything back at end of class while students are writing in their planners or during an independent work time, so they're doing something while you're doing all this housekeeping. Could have also done while they're doing the grammar study guide later on.
- Not all students have binder on desk while handing back homework (six are missing it). Repeats where it's going to go. I highly recommend that you don't give them the instructions. Don't *tell* them where to put it, *ask* them where it makes sense to file it. Get them to do the thinking.
- "As soon as I see that everyone has their work filed, we'll move on to the next thing here." Good!
- Had agenda written on board and checking off while going through. Clear way for them to feel that things are organized and they know what's coming. And probably helpful for you! ☺

### Grammar Study Guide

- Teacher asks how comfortable they feel with diagramming. Great posing a very specific question: "If I gave you 6 diagrams, how many of you think you could solve them all?" Much more clear than "how well do you think you know this?" The class had mixed responses about their comfort level.
- Lots of yelling out when they hear they have a quest on Wednesday. Mostly upset because Halloween. Start comparing to 4<sup>th</sup> graders. This could have been turned into a "challenge" opportunity: "Yes, the 4<sup>th</sup> graders do have a test. Don't you want to show up those 4<sup>th</sup> graders?! You think you can't even have a *quest* on Halloween?! Man, 4<sup>th</sup> graders more studious than 6<sup>th</sup> graders..." Play that kind of thing up! When you said it was just 6 diagrams, they seem to feel a little better.
- Hands out study guide for quest.
- "Study guide has more questions than the quest so you'll be really prepared."
- Tell them to test themselves now! Set up as a challenge. "Those of you who said you could solve them now – let's see!" "For those of you who think you can't solve them now, how many out of \_\_\_ do you think you *can* solve? Write that number on the top of your paper and see if you can get that many!" More motivating than thinking the review is just for the test. It's a review of *what they've learned*, so that should be the motivation, what they're focused on.
- They start on the study guide while you're still handing it out. Use the students to hand things out so you're not wasting your time! Also hand out in rows/columns (students passing back) so don't have to hand to each student individually.
- Two students working through and not paying attention to oral instructions. Halfway through instructions, half the students had already gotten started and aren't listening. Tip: 1) Give instructions before handing anything out, 2) Have them read through the instructions out loud as a class, 3) "Pencils down". If pencil is in hand and work is in front of them, they're not going to listen to what you have to say (I know, I was one of those students ;).
- One student asked if they could have Halloween sentences to diagram since quest is on Halloween. Those are the little things that add so much spirit to the class! Definitely a good idea! And I'm just curious: do the students ever get to make up their own sentences to diagram? I don't know if that would be effective, but could be great motivationally.
- You ask for general class questions and then tell them to get started; you'll come around to answer individual questions. Great to make the distinction between class questions and individual ones!
- All students got started right away.
- Talked to one student for a long time while two other students sitting with hands raised.
- Girl in front row still has reading book sitting on her desk. Should be put away.
- One student is not using a ruler for his underlining like the other students are. (But he does for diagramming.)
- One girl got up to get a piece of loose-leaf paper. Why doesn't she have her own?
- Should have them get out a piece of paper before they begin. Each time someone gets out a binder to get out paper, it makes disruptive noise and they all do it at some point. Good way to get them to be planners: hand out assignment and say, "What do you need to complete this?" Have them get out all supplies right at the beginning.
- Maybe cut down on individual questions if they can ask a neighbor first? Five hands in the air while working with one student.
- What are all these questions? Are they the same or different for each student? Is this going to happen during the quiz?
- Now seven kids with hands in the air. Need to do something different. I wish I could help with their questions!
- VERY good at whispering so not interrupting other students.

- One girl seems to enjoy the diagramming. Awesome to see her being so neat!
- Students all working productively when they don't have questions.
- Girl in front pretty much wasted an entire hour just sitting there. Looks like she doesn't know how to do the work. I asked her if she was having trouble, she said that you were coming around to correct it. Maybe before moving on to diagrams? Is this the case for every student? Takes way too long to correct each individual's paper like that. Need something else in place. Maybe have answer key in front of room? Correct as class? Let them move on before it's corrected? So many students wasting time with their hands in the air.
- Two students had to use bathroom during class. One girl asked to go to the office, but I think it was after she finished.
- Gives two minute warning before wrap up activity.
- Awesome you're cognizant of the fact that they have a science test tomorrow so you don't assign grammar homework. They recognized that *you* recognized this. 😊

### Literature

- Hands back *Miracle Worker Summary Questions*. You say you're very happy with how well-prepared they all were. "Enabled us to have a really great discussion." Great to show the outcome of their hard work.
- Don't *tell* with instructions (e.g. "File these here") but ask them where it makes sense, "where you should file this?" Have them do the thinking at every step along the way. Makes them better thinkers, planners, and keeps them more engaged.
- Some students grabbing pillows and having them to lean against in their chair. I would totally do the same! But could see this becoming a problem if there aren't enough pillows for everyone who wants one (three students have them). Maybe rotate throughout the week? Probably is special for them, and certainly more comfortable! So long as not a distraction (started distracting one of them).
- Students definitely reading over comments on work that's handed back. 😊 Great you gave them time for this.
- One boy doesn't; he continues reading Steve Jobs book. He's read this for half the class!
- "If time, read aloud" on board. Set this up as a goal at the beginning of class. Gets them to do everything more efficiently. Time is not to be wasted!
- Hands out unit checklist. Pump this up more. This is *everything they've done* being put *all in one place!* Comes off as too procedural here, when it's actually an exciting thing!
- Going to do a coverage page for unit; "Has anyone ever done a cover page before?" Let's have one of you explain what it is. A good explanation: gave good examples! You reinforced that these were good examples, it was a good description.
- Clarifies in advance: something you draw, not something you print out from computer. Why? Let *them* guess answers before telling them.
- They're totally excited to do these cover pages; they want to get started!
- Keeps handing out everything one-at-a-time and tells them where to file it. Again, use students to hand things out, and have them tell *you* where they think they should file it.
- Students want to get started on cover pages. Others want to do read aloud.
- One child dropping things all throughout class (paperclips earlier on, water bottle, pencil, etc.) Dropped water bottle goes by printer? There are a lot up there! Like that you implemented this! 😊
- Give instructions orally. Then hand things back while writing in planners after having gotten *all* instructions! They can multi-task more than this.
- One girl starts putting unit together instead of writing in planner.

## **Overall**

It's so clear that the students really respect and like you, and I could tell immediately, just in a few interactions you had with students, how much you care about reaching them. Even just the way you always kneel down to get at their eye-level when speaking with them one-on-one; that's the kind of thing that doesn't happen naturally for many people, and it's awesome that you already have so many of these skills! Even just asking how the students feel about different things goes such a long way to making them feel valued and respected in return (you asked them how they felt about the quest, how they felt about the discussion questions, etc.).

The class also had a very organized, very orderly feel to it; instructions were always clear, and students knew what was coming next. The agenda was written on the board, and you consistently crossed off items as the class progressed. You were great at setting up expectations "Two more minutes for this" or "Last answer I'm going to take". Impressive classroom management...and always with a positive spin. I can't believe you've only been teaching for two months!

A few tips to help:

- Housekeeping can be more efficient
  - During every transition, and every housekeeping procedure, ask yourself: "What should *students* be doing during this time?" They should be working on something, not just waiting for whatever you're passing out/collecting. The goal should be that there's no "waiting time" for students in a class. But this is very difficult to achieve since kids work at such different paces! I ran into this problem *a lot* in math classes, and one of the pieces of advice I found most helpful was to approach lesson planning by thinking *not* just about what *I'm* going to do in every moment (which, I think, comes more naturally for teachers during the planning phase), but what *students* are going to be doing in every moment. That shift in perspective can be so helpful in avoiding any wait time on their part. In this case, if you're handing out papers, maybe students should also be writing in their planners. If they've been working on something, have another "take the challenge" question available for early-finishers.
  - Don't hand out work to each individual student. Designate a *student* to hand out papers, or you can hand them back in rows (they pass back to each other). Saves a *lot* of time.
  - Collect all homework at once, maybe even have them leave it out on their desk before lunch so you can collect it before class. And if possible, hand *out* everything at once. Get all the housekeeping done in one swipe! Helps transitions flow better without as many disruptions.
- Instructions (and applies more generally)
  - Don't *tell* students what you want them to do, or *tell* them the answers to things, have *them* tell *you*! "Where should you file this?" "why do you think we're doing it this way?" And so on. Not only will it keep them more engaged at every turn, but it also helps build awareness – we want them to know *why* they're doing everything you're asking of them. Makes them active thinkers, not passive recipients of information.
  - Give oral instructions *before* handing out a piece of work (or make sure their pencils are down if they have the work), otherwise they're going to get started and not listen to the instructions (I know, I was one of those students ;).
- Sharing/Sightings

- Make sure that if students are sharing answers, readings, sightings, etc. that it's productive for the *whole class*. May need to do some creative thinking about this; maybe raise in next Language Arts meeting to see how other teachers handle this?
- There's something good about sharing the grammar sightings because it's reinforcing that students look out into the world, they see this content they're learning outside of the classroom. But it doesn't seem as productive or as exciting as it could be. There are too many examples given that aren't great; one thoughtful example could be more powerful. Maybe assign a grammar sighting to one student a week, and have them present it to the class more formally? Have them write it down on the board and have the class identify *why* it's wrong? Why do they think it happened? How would it be correct? Would make it more exciting, get more engagement, and give it more depth. I also have the sense (although I could totally be wrong!) that it's probably the same students who want to share these over and over. We need to get the other ones looking out into the world, too, so assigning this may be better.
- Energy/Excitement/Motivation
  - I know this class isn't representative of most of your classes in terms of energy, but even a class with a lot of "housekeeping" (filing, etc.) could be made more exciting and engaging for the students. But it has to come from *you*. I got the sense that you weren't all that excited about what you were doing today, and so there was no reason for the students to be excited either. When planning a class like that, think beforehand why you're having the students do everything. Why should they be excited about taking a quest? Why should they be excited about putting together their units? Reminding *yourself* why these are so valuable will help get that excitement across to the students.
  - Turn things into a challenge whenever possible! For example, when handing out the grammar study guide, you could have asked students to make an estimate of how many problems they'd get correct, have them write that number on the top of the page, and then have them compare it to how many they *do* get correct! Before they start the solving, say, "Those of you who said you could solve them all now – let's see it! For those of you who think you can't solve them all now, how many out of six do you think you *can* solve? Write that number on the top of your paper and see if you can get that many!" This is more motivating than thinking that the review is just for the test. It's a review of *what they've learned*, so that should be the motivation, what they're focused on. What *have* they learned? Same with drawing the cover sheet for their units. Ask how many of them already think they're perfect, master artists. 😊 Then ask how many of them want to get better at drawing. Tell them that the cover page is a great opportunity to practice those skills. Anything that gets students focused on their own progress is usually pretty motivating.