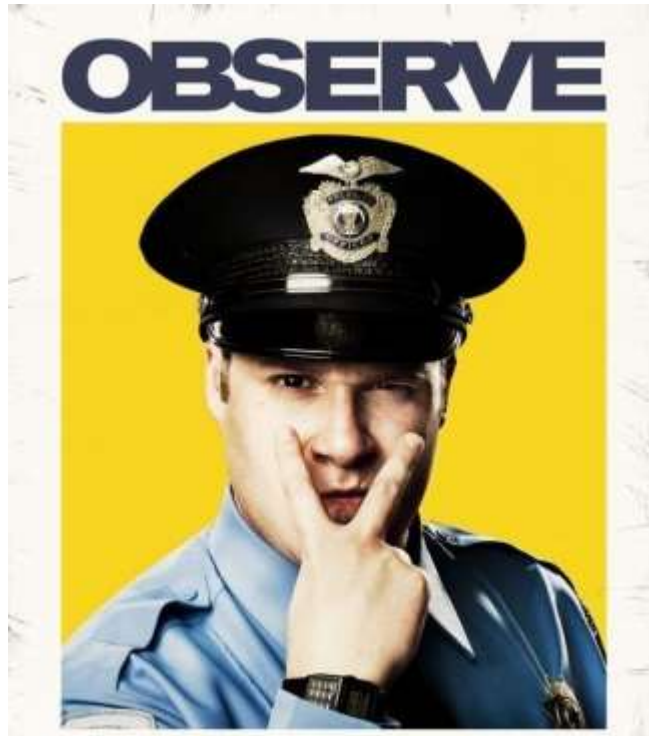# Am I Doing This Right: How Will Peer Observation Impact Me as a Teacher?

Lewis Gabriele

Context

"It is necessary ... for a man to go away by himself ... to sit on a rock ... and ask, 'Who am I, where have I been, and where am I going?"

- Poet Carl August Sandburg

I currently teach at Morris Hills High School in Rockaway, New Jersey. It is a public, regional high school established in 1953, pulling from three surrounding towns, Rockaway Borough, Wharton and parts of Rockaway Township. It has a student population of 1,229. The schools ethnic breakdown is 60% Caucasian, 26.5% Hispanic, 8.5% Asian and 6% African American. It has a gender breakdown of 55% male to 45% female. Morris Hills currently employs 104 teachers for a student to teacher ratio of 13:1. The economical background for the majority of students would be described as middle to lower middle class with over 20% of our student population being eligible for free or reduced price lunch. It has been listed in *New Jersey Monthly Magazine* as a "Top Public School" and recently received a Silver Award from *US News and World Report.* It ranks in the 86th percentile in academic achievement when compared to other schools in the state.

I am a member of the Art department at Morris Hills. I teach traditional art classes which includes: Foundation Art, Intro to Studio Art, and Cartooning and Animation. The make-up of the art classes I teach range of students grades 9 through 12, with class size ranging from 20 to 24. I do not travel for my classes and teach in one room only. Classes are broken up into 90-minute blocks, with 4 blocks taught every school day. Teachers teach up to 3 blocks a day with one set aside for prep. The typical student will spend 6

hours and 57 minutes in session in a normal school day. I have been teaching at Morris Hills for seven years, as well as serving as the Head Coach of the Junior Varsity Boys' Basketball Team

Throughout my seven years teaching, I have been plagued by the question: "Am I doing this right?" I have been reviewed by my superiors and have always had positive reviews. My students appear to enjoy my classes but I was always curious: how was I as a teacher compared to others? What kind of atmosphere do other teachers foster in their classes? How much do they prepare for their classes? How do other teachers handle certain situations?

Personally, I have always relied on this type of self-reflection in order to achieve some level of self-improvement. When it came to teaching, I was confident that I was working hard, yet I was still plagued by self-doubt. I asked questions of my peers, but their answers still couldn't ultimately placate me or answer my question, "how were they teaching in their classes?"

The question that I will be asking for my research project is "What effects will observing my peers have on my own teaching?" with the a sub questions being, " In what ways will it impact my classroom instruction? I feel that it is important because by undertaking this observation process, I am seeking to find strategies that will improve my own teaching. Instructional delivery, classroom management, assessment techniques will all be observed. I am looking at this chance for observation of my peers as a form of professional development. I will be able to see how other teachers handle situations in a class and compare and contrast these with my own. Through this, I hope to find similar traits, strategies and skills that successful teachers employ and integrate them into my

own teaching style. I hope to eventually show the results of my research to administration and to attempt to demonstrate to them the value, if any, of peer observation.

This research could also introduce the idea of peer observation as a tool that the school can utilize and implement to not only new teachers, but as something veteran teachers can participate in to learn new techniques or help other teachers with questions. Imagine a teaching environment where teachers could utilize each others experience, using these opportunities to observe as a way to help each their find solutions to classroom issues. It could be a great chance for growth and learning without the fear or apprehension that comes along with an observation from an administrator.

This observation process will help me to obtain specific strategies that effective teachers share in common as well as how they can be used across the curriculum as well as different classes. The interview component of this process will also allow me to find out aspects of these teachers that may not be seen through a standard observation. These formal and informal interviews will give me a chance to ask questions that pertain to my own teaching. For instance, how much time should a teacher put into this or her lessons? How much does content mastery play into making someone an effective teacher? I hope to compare and contrast what I learn with my own experiences. This is an opportunity for professional development, as well as a way to see what makes a teacher highly effective. It will also be a chance take a look into the pros and cons of the observation process from a teacher's perspective.

In order to establish what teachers are effective or ineffective, I plan on using multiple methods. I will begin by asking administration and peers for recommendations on which teachers they feel would be the best candidates for a meaningful observation. I

also plan on taking student input into account. This way I will have effectively

triangulated what teachers I should ask to observe, hoping to get at least three teachers to

participate. I will try to make sure that they are diverse as far as content area. I feel that

this will give me a chance to see effective strategies across content areas, as well as major

similarities that these teachers may share.

One issue that I will have to tackle: how will I be able to tell successful strategies

from non-successful strategies throughout the lesson? How will I, as a teacher, (with no

training in observing and critiquing) rate other teachers in terms of whether they are

effective or ineffective? In order to help with these issues I will ask to use the observation

form that is currently being utilized in district. This form is used to rate teachers on a

four-point scale. The scale ranges from ineffective (1, the lowest) to highly effective (4,

the highest).

(Figure 1: Description of Teacher Ratings)

Terms Used in Rating Scale

Stronge and Associates
Educational Consulting

Category	Description	Definition
Highly Effective	The teacher maintains performance, accomplishments, and behaviors that consistently and considerably surpass the established standard.	**Exceptional Performance** • Sustains high performance over period of time • Behaviors have strong positive impact on learners and school climate • Serves as role model to others
Effective	The teacher meets the standard in a manner that is consistent with the school's mission and goals.	**Proficient Performance** • Meets the requirements contained in job description as expressed in evaluation criteria • Behaviors have positive impact on learners and school climate • Willing to learn and apply new skills
Partially Effective	The teacher often performs below the established standard or in a manner that is inconsistent with the school's missions and goals.	**Below Acceptable Performance** • Requires support in meeting the standards • Results in less than quality work performance • Leads to areas for teacher improvement being jointly identified and planned between teacher and evaluator
Ineffective	The teacher consistently performs below the established standards or in a manner that is inconsistent with the school's missions and goals.	**Unacceptable Performance** • Does not meet requirements contained in job description as expressed in evaluation criteria • Results in minimal student learning • May result in employee not being recommended for continued employment

This form has been a subject of debate among teachers, as they feel that it is skewed unfairly, rendering a highly effective rating extremely difficult to achieve. Other debates rage over the fact that by grading all teachers against this form administration is taking the autonomy out of teaching. Many teachers feel they are unfairly being forced to teach all subjects in the exact same fashion, regardless of personal teaching style.

In order to establish continuity among their observations our administration has attended training sessions held by experts on the Stronge (2007) evaluation method. During these training sessions our administration was asked to all view the same lessons and rate the teacher based on what they observed. Afterwards they compared their findings in order to make sure that they were properly observing and rating the lesson. They were also shown example lessons in each of the four rating categories, and what differences to look for in order to differentiate between the four Stronge (2007) ratings. In addition to this training, each educational department held meetings in which the differences between the ratings were explained, with the focus being on what made someone a highly effective teacher versus effective. We were given handouts in order to better explain the difference between the two (See Appendix). The following figure is as sample from that handout:

(Figure 2 Difference between effective vs. highly effective)

Standard	Effective	Highly Effective	Questions to Consider for Highly Effective Rating
1 Professional Knowledge	The teacher demonstrates an understanding of the curriculum, subject content, and the developmental needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.	In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher **consistently** demonstrates **extensive** knowledge of the subject matter and **continually** enriches the curriculum.	How does the teacher go above and beyond in contributing to the enrichment of the curriculum and providing unique educational experiences for all students?
2 Instructional Planning	The teacher plans using the state's standards, the school's curriculum, effective strategies, resources, and data to meet the needs of all students.	In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher **actively** seeks and uses **alternative** data and resources and **consistently** **differentiates** plans to meet the needs of all students.	How does the teacher find and use alternative data and design lessons to meet the individual needs of all students on an ongoing basis?

I hope by conducting this research I will be able to see the observation process, along with its accompanying forms, from a different perspective. I will be going through this process for the first time as the observer, and instead of being judged will have to be the one determining the value of these lessons. I do not intend to sit and judge my peers however, I am looking for techniques and strategies that are similar across content areas with effective teachers. In this regard, my observations will differ from that of the administration but I hope to still find valid and applicable information throughout it. By undertaking this observation process I hope to shed light on the work that effective teachers are putting into their classes and show effective strategies throughout content areas.

I feel that this is not only an important question but also an important chance to prove the relevance of peer observation in the educational system. I personally feel that new teachers do not receive enough in the way of preparation and guidance throughout their first year teaching. The mentoring process is often dependant upon the strength of the specific mentor. What happens when that mentor isn't an effective teacher/mentor? I speak from personal experience when I say that my mentoring experience was less then ideal. I feel I would have been much better served by simply being given time to watch

and observe other teachers. The ability to watch how other teachers conduct themselves in the class, how they craft and prepare for a lesson, how they present information as well as handle discipline would have been an invaluable tool at that stage in my career. Shouldn't new teachers be able to watch a number of different teachers throughout different subjects areas in order to observe how various teachers work in the classroom?

So in completing this research I hope that I can come away with not only strategies and techniques that highly effective teachers share, but also information that helps show the importance of peer observation in the educational system. Too often I feel our professional development focuses too much on theory and self-contained classes. I feel that any teacher who was given the chance to watch effective teachers and study from people actually in the field would be much better prepared to teach their own classes. I remember feeling concern my first year regarding my teaching style was I teaching the right way? Do I put in enough time? Was my classroom management good enough? If I were able to observe other classrooms it would have gone a long way towards quelling those anxieties and fears.

When observing other teachers I will perform a pre-observation as well as a post observation. I will use the pre-observation as a chance to sit with each teacher and discuss material being taught as well as teaching strategies they intend on using throughout the lesson. The post observation will be a chance for me to remark and discuss how the teacher felt the lesson went as well as what changes might be made next time. It will also be an opportunity for me to discuss what strategies and techniques I might be able to apply to my own lessons. This way staff development can progress organically, and not

something that a school simply forces their teaching staff to conduct. In the following section I will discuss relevant literature on the subject of peer observations.
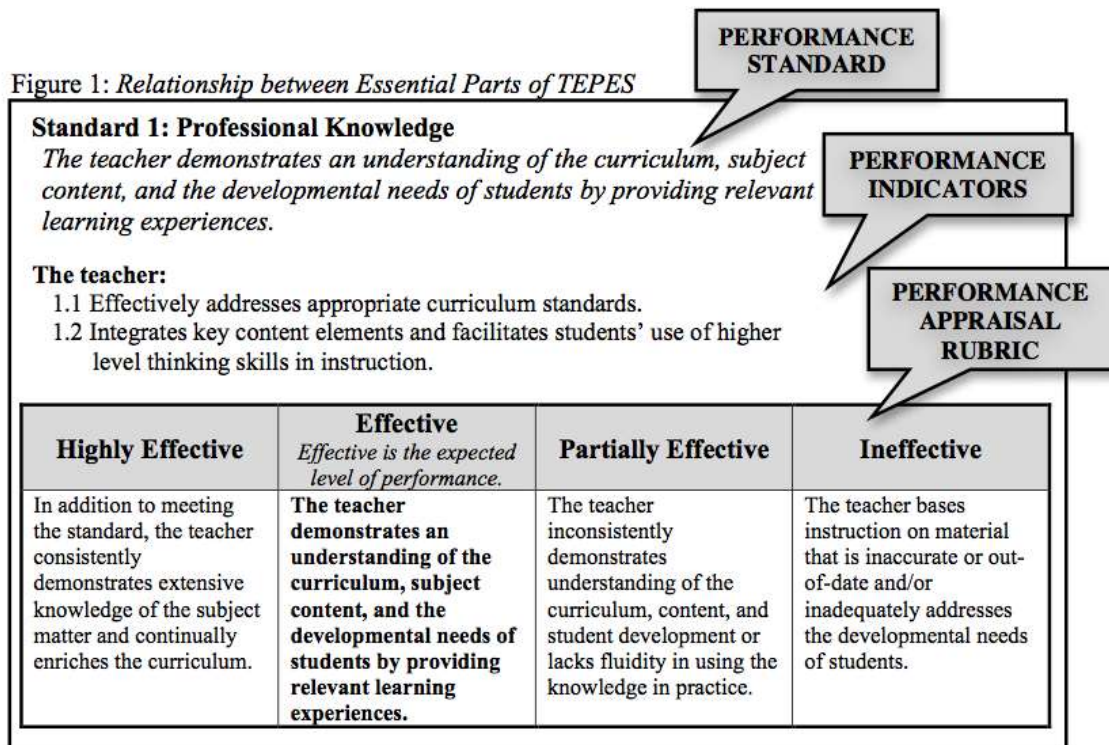
Literature Review

Peer observation is defined as "a collaborative and reciprocal process whereby one peer observes another's teaching and provides supportive and constructive feedback. Its underlying rationale is to encourage professional development in teaching and learning through critical reflection, by both observer and observee." (Lublin, 2002). It is a tool by which educators can hope to improve our own teaching, by listening to feedback about their own teaching, as well as observing successful strategies employed by our colleagues. This is an extremely relevant topic due to the pressure being put on school districts to make sure that their teaching staffs are highly effective and that non-effective teachers are not retained.

Stronge Evaluation Model

My district has adopted the Stronge model for teacher evaluation. It was developed Dr. James Stronge. His background includes working as a teacher, counselor, and district-level administrator. His believes that " a conceptually sound, well designed, and properly implemented evaluation system for teachers is an important – indeed, essential – component of an effective school"(Stronge, 2007). His research has focused on clearly defining essential components of effective teaching. He has broken these down into seven performance standards. They are professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional delivery, assessment of/for learning, learning environment,

professionalism, and student progress. Each one is graded on a four-point scale (See

figure 1). These four points range from ineffective, partially effective, effective and

finally highly effective. Below is a sample rubric for the professional knowledge standard

(Stronge, 2007).

Figure 1: *Relationship between Essential Parts of TEPES*

Standard 1: Professional Knowledge
The teacher demonstrates an understanding of the curriculum, subject content, and the developmental needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.

PERFORMANCE STANDARD

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL RUBRIC

The teacher:
1.1 Effectively addresses appropriate curriculum standards.
1.2 Integrates key content elements and facilitates students' use of higher level thinking skills in instruction.

Highly Effective	Effective *Effective is the expected level of performance.*	Partially Effective	Ineffective
In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher consistently demonstrates extensive knowledge of the subject matter and continually enriches the curriculum.	**The teacher demonstrates an understanding of the curriculum, subject content, and the developmental needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.**	The teacher inconsistently demonstrates understanding of the curriculum, content, and student development or lacks fluidity in using the knowledge in practice.	The teacher bases instruction on material that is inaccurate or out-of-date and/or inadequately addresses the developmental needs of students.

(Stronge, 2007)

As defined by the Stronge teacher evaluation model currently used by my district,

a highly effective teacher is "one who sustains high performance over period of time,

behaviors have strong positive impact on learners and school climate and serves as role

model to others"(Stronge, 2007). A non-effective teacher is defined as " The teacher

consistently performs below the established standards or in a manner that is inconsistent

with the school's missions and goals and whose performance results in minimal student

learning" (Stronge, 2007).

Peer Observation

Regarding peer observations and its positive impact Israel (2014) examined peer observation and talked with experts about the advantages of this emerging professional development strategy. She found that as teachers engaged in the process of peer observation, they were able to implement ideas and strategies into their own classrooms. When used as a form of professional development for teachers it was extremely effective. Teachers were able to acquire new skills and ideas at professional conferences and then model these ideas for their colleagues. Peer observations were found to be most successful when the teacher and observer worked together and reflected on the teaching behavior observed. She found that this interaction among colleagues created a sense of community and built a level of trust among faculty. While no one way is considered "correct" when conducting peer observations, Israel notes that teacher observation is most successful when teacher and observer work together and reflect on the teaching behavior. It is least successful when the observer spends hours watching without analysis or dialogue with the teacher (Israel, 2014). Thus, we can see the positive impact peer observation has not only for the development of individual teachers, but for building a sense of community among teachers as well.

Richardson (2000) explored the benefits of peer observation through his personal observations of the process. He describes his process in detail, his fears and trepidations, as well as his expectations and hopes. He begins his peer observation process by interviewing fellow teachers and gauging their interest in taking part in being observed.

He remarks that many teachers met his invitation with some slight hesitation, if not an outright refusal. However, he finds others more than willing to cooperate even though he feels that there is "something unnerving about having a colleague in your classroom" (Richardson, 2000).

Throughout the course of his work with his peer observations, he concluded that peer observation allows teachers to glean from a wide variety of sources. It fosters a sense of career-long learning, demonstrates to students that learning is an essential part of what educators do and that finally, promotes a forum to talk about good teaching. He felt that faculties had tremendous power to influence, support and learn from each other if the environment is right for such collaboration. However, since this research was based on the author's individual experience we cannot know if every teacher will feel the same.

In an attempt to look peer observation through the viewpoint of multiple teachers, Bieler (2014) interviewed five teachers who took part in peer observation and talked about the effects it had not only on their teaching, but their mental health as well. Bieler (2014) states that statistics show nearly half of all teachers leave the profession within their first five years (Ingersoll, 2002,2003) Due to this experienced teachers, as well as administration, should consider adding support to new teachers as a way of quelling fears in addition to making teachers comfortable in the classroom.

Effect on Staff

A major focus throughout Bieler's (2014) interviews is the idea of community. Each of the teachers interviewed listed the increase feeling of community, a sense of trust

and connection to fellow teachers as among the most important takeaways from the peer observation process. According to Bielers' (2014) research, the sense of friendship between new teachers who observed experienced teachers led to a sense of comfort for those new teachers that were experiencing trepidation and fear in relation to their jobs. These teachers claimed that the ability to observe experienced teachers, even in other subject areas, helped create a collaborative professional learning community where ideas where shared along with instructional strategies. Beilers (2014) found that according to research it has been confirmed that there is a link between increased teacher community and increase student achievement.

Horncastle and Sharp (2012) conducted a research action project at Havering Sixth Form College in order to review the college's peer observation process. Their research was focused on whether the schools peer observation process, the aim of which was to improve teaching and disseminate good practices, added meaningfully to teachers' professional development. In their study they conducted a survey among the colleges teaching staff to gather feedback based on their experience of the peer observation process. This survey served to give them an idea of how peer observations was being conducted, when and how frequently. The second study collected qualitative data through feedback from the faculty. This served as a way to find out what positive impacts peer observation had on them professionally as teachers. According to their findings, teachers in general found peer observation was "much respected as a procedure and as a teaching improvement tool and that many staff benefit from it" (Horncastle, Sharp, 2012).

Their research was not only based on data collected from their own Havering Sixth Form College but on practices in other schools and colleges. They found that by

doing this they were able to explore a range of innovative teaching development methods. In their research they state one teaching method that proved to be particularly helpful was peer coaching. They define peer coaching as a "non-directive approach where the teacher is coached to find his or her own solutions; the one who is observing is the one who is learning" (Showers, 1985). They found that peer coaching took many forms, and while it involved a pre conference, observation and post conference, this was not intended to be an observation. Instead these peer-coaching groups were "an opportunity for teachers to take risks and try something new with the assistance of a self selected coach that the teacher trusts" (Horncastle Sharp, 2012). They concluded that the relaxed atmosphere of peer observation, along with peer coaching, helped foster teaching communities that provided feedback and support without the threatening experience associated with a summative observation.

Peer Coaching

Beverly Showers examined the purpose and strategies involved in successful peer coaching. The focus of her research was to provide an overview of peer coaching, why it's needed in education and what separates coaching from supervising. She found that teachers often needed help in successfully attempting to implement new strategies or curriculum innovation. Because of the nature of learning a new skill, the ability to try, experiment and even fail played a huge role. Coaching therefore provides a structure that educators can use to help learn these new strategies without fear of evaluation.

Attempting to integrate new strategies into a class is something that requires accurate specific and non-evaluative feedback, and this is where peer coaching comes in to play.

Peer coaching gives teaching communities the chance to implement new strategies and teaching techniques without the fear of failure or the apprehension of trying something new. Through coaching she found that teachers developed small communities and groups that provided timely and specific feedback to each other. Through these peer-coaching groups teachers were then able to integrate new strategies over time, creating a cycle of analysis, study, hypotheses creation and testing. This then led to these groups of teachers to becoming increasingly effective at both helping one another and inducting new teachers into the process. The advantage of peer coaching was that when teachers implemented new strategies they used those new strategies more appropriately, exhibited greater long term retention of knowledge and skills and were much more likely than non-coached teachers to teach the new strategies to their students (Showers 1982; 1984).

It appears that peer observations are seen as a positive form of professional development, not only for individual teachers but for the community that it impacts as well. Peer observation, along with peer coaching, has been proven to provide positive feedback for teachers and allows the implementation of new teaching strategies without the fear of failure that may be associated with them. By separating the idea of evaluation from the observation teachers are beginning to see the benefits and importance of their fellow colleagues. Peer observation, when done properly, can have a powerful effect on the teachers who undertake it, with its benefits moving on to our students. In an

environment where teachers are under more scrutiny than ever, it would appear that this can be a powerful tool to helping change student learning as well as public perception.

In this section I have reviewed relevant literature on the topic of peer observation, its effects on teachers and schools as a whole. In the next section I will explain the process through which I conducted the observations.

Methodology

The point of my research is to answer the following question: What effect will peer observation have on my own teaching? Through the peer observation process I am focusing on techniques that successful teachers employ, and how I can possibly implement these strategies into my own classroom. The most important step for me was to make sure I was watching teachers with a proven "track record." I hoped to observe various teaching methods as well as a multiple successful strategies by selecting from a group of teachers that has the respect of their students as well as accolades from their peers,

Participants

A total of three teachers were observed. They were from three different subject areas, History, Math and Art. The subjects were chosen in order to get a wide range of techniques and styles as well as a way to make connections between the disciplines in terms of successful strategies and techniques. The goal of this research is to identify successful strategies and to eventually implement these techniques into my own class.s.

The teachers observed, two males and one female, ranged in age from 30 to late 50's with 5 to over 25 years of teaching experience.

The teachers included in this study represent some of the most effective teachers in my school based on several factors. The first factor was determined by having discussions with my administration, including assistant principals as well as department supervisors to decide which teachers would make for quality observations. Second, I asked my peers which teachers they felt best demonstrated respectable teaching qualities that would be beneficial to observe. My last source was asking a group of sixty students.. Based off these three methods, I came up with a set of teachers that I felt confident would display superior teaching strategies in their class

My district rates teachers on a four point scale, the steps being ineffective, partially effective, effective and lastly highly effective. Although the district itself was not willing to disclose these scores with me, I found teachers that were willing to share them. While not all of the teachers I have observed were rated "highly effective" they are widely known as exemplars throughout our school. I did ask an administrator what teachers he would recommend for the observations and was surprised to find all of the teachers that I had planned to observe being named among them.

<div align="center">Data Sources</div>

The data that I collected was culled from multiple sources. These included a pre-observation form, a formal observation form, a post observation meeting and my personal journals. For the pre-observation I used a form that our school district uses to conduct

our official observations (See Appendix). It is a questionnaire that is designed to give the observer a feel for what he or she is about to observe and focus on particular parts of the lesson. The purpose of the pre-observation was to establish a background for what I was going to be watching in the classroom, an outline of the lesson I was going to observe and allowed me to concentrate on certain aspects of the lesson depending on what I was interested in observing (ex: classroom management, instructional delivery, visual aides etc.).

The next step was the observation itself. I sat in for the full block of instruction (88 minutes) in most cases. In an attempt to be as unobtrusive as possible, I would position myself towards the back of the class. I used our districts formal observation form during the observation to take notes on the lesson. This form (see Appendix) allows the observer to collect data broken down into seven categories, ranging from instructional strategies to learning environment to professionalism. I asked teachers to teach as they normally would and to not make any exceptions despite my presence. There is a stigma about the observation process among some teachers and I did not want to put pressure on a teacher to act out of character because of the observation.

As recommended by Israel (2014) I engaged in a reflective process with the observed teacher. This was an informal discussion regarding each teacher's lesson and what they felt about the lesson as well as my own thoughts. Three questions I asked of each participant were: How do you feel your lesson went? What changes would you have made looking back? What are their thoughts on the idea of peer observation? These meetings lasted from fifteen to thirty minutes and were conducted during lunch breaks or teacher prep periods. These meetings often yielded as much information as the

observations themselves, as I got to hear teachers' rationales for their lessons and how to self-assess and make changes going forward.

After the observation process was finished I recorded my observations in a journal. I felt that these entries would be extremely useful as journals "provide teachers with a way to revisit, analyze and evaluate their experiences over time and in relation to broader frames of reference" (Cochran-Smith, Lytle). I used this as a way to express my thoughts on each teacher's individual styles, reflect on my own style and try to see what changes I may want to implement. I wrote the journal entries immediately after the observations while my immediate reactions were still fresh in my mind. I would then revisit my journal entry sometime afterward the lesson and determine if my feelings towards it had changed at all. I also used journaling as a way to talk about my feelings toward the observation process, my own personal biases toward teaching styles and questions about my own teaching method.

<div align="center">Analysis Plan</div>

After collecting my data, I planned on going over the interviews, observation notes as well as my personal journals and begin the process of coding for themes. The method of coding for themes meant that I would have to go over all of my research looking for patterns, categories, repetition, connections and similarities. It is during this process that I hope to find similarities and common traits amongst the teachers that were observed. By using multiple sources (interviews, observations, journals) I will effectively triangulate

specific traits of these effective teachers. In the following section, I will present my findings from the observation process.

Findings and Analysis

Throughout my observations, teacher interviews and journaling I was looking for successful strategies employed by effective teachers that would positively affect my teaching, and consequently my student learning, while also exploring the benefits of peer observation. A significant portion of the literature on peer observation cites its positive impact, not only on the observer, but on the teacher being observed as well. As stated by Stephanie Hirsh (2015), Deputy Executive Director of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) "peer observation is key to supporting a new vision for professional development". While there may be challenges to peer observation (time constraints, teacher non-participation), my research supports the belief that the peer observation can extremely insightful and an incredible chance for professional development

Pre-Observation

When I first began asking teachers to observe their classes, those teachers that accepted were eager and willing to have someone come into their classroom. It became apparent through my pre observation meeting with them that these teachers had a very clear plan and understanding of what they were going to present to the classes as well as what strategies they intended on using. The focus on preparation was apparent in each interview as well as the teacher's knowledge of their specific content area.

I used our districts pre-observation form (see appendix) to guide my interview. I found this form to be useful because it was efficient in acquiring the basic information regarding the lesson, such as: the focus of the lesson, location of the lesson in the unit and lesson assessment forms. I found this form to be lacking as it was an extremely clinical take on a lesson. It focuses mainly on the procedure of the class, and not enough personal elements from each individual teacher. I feel that teaching is truly an art, something that no two people can do the same. The autonomy of the classroom teacher is what allows for amazing moments in a students school experience. This form however didn't have any personal insights from the teacher, and therefore gives the suggestion that there are right and wrong answers, when really there are countless ways to teach any lesson successfully. For example one teacher remarked that her class contained multiple non-native English speakers, and because of this would rely more heavily on visual demonstrations as well as videos. A second teacher explained that he would be focusing on a very specific moral argument for his AP history class due to the fact that during their previous class it had been such a great source of debate and discussion. The standard pre observation form doesn't have the place for this type of information, regardless of how much it may impact what the observer may see in the class.

Where I found the most useful information was during the informal parts of the pre observations where teachers would open up and explain why they might be doing things, or how they were looking to try new strategies based on how a lesson might be progressing. I feel the relaxed environment of a simple discussion between two teachers really helped make my peers and I open up about not only the lessons, but also teaching in general. For example, during these conversations one teacher discussed how she came

up with the idea for a lesson, and how she would complete a small mock up of the lesson to see what her students would experience. She then went on to explain she would create the project as if she was visually impaired, suffered from attention disorder or was a non-native English speaker, all of which were representative of her class population. She explained that she would make changes based on how she felt these types of students might react to her lesson. It is these moments that I feel my administration does not get to experience, they spend so much time simply trying to get this paperwork filled out and finished, that the majority of the time that could be spent getting to understand our teaching staff and getting to know their strengths is wasted. Regardless these pre observations paved the way for the next step in my research, the actual observations.

<div align="center">Themes</div>

After conducting my observations, I found that while each teacher's styles were unique, they all shared similar qualities and traits. After reviewing my notes, and looking for patterns and similarities, I settled on three themes that were prevalent throughout each teacher's classes. These were each teacher's content knowledge, level of preparation and classroom environment. The following section will explain these themes, how each teacher displayed them in their own way as well, as the similarities and differences between them.

Content Knowledge

The first theme that was readily apparent in conducting my research was the level of content mastery displayed by these teachers. It was evident that these individuals were knowledgeable in their specific content areas. They never struggled to supply adequate answers and explanations to student questions and they worked without referencing notes. The first teacher I observed, Mr. Mein, teaches AP History. Throughout his class his command of the content area was readily apparent. As this was an AP class complex questions were asked and the teacher was always ready to answer them completely, even when they veered slightly off topic. Examples of such questions were "What were the long term societal impacts of the bomb dropping on Japan?" and "Why did the United Sates target those specific cities in Japan?" After talking to the teacher in the post-observation, I discovered that these questions existed outside the scope of the curriculum, yet the teacher was able to answer the student's questions concisely and with clarity. The ease with which he was able to answer these questions had a visible impact on his students as well, as you could see students perk up and listen intently to his answers.

Mrs. Wagner was the second teacher I observed. She is a veteran art teacher with over twenty-five years experience. She is known for, as one administrator stated, "getting the most out of her kids". Throughout the class, the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter was readily apparent, not only from execution of her lesson but also her ability to expound on topics and go into great depth regarding any part of the lesson. As an Art teacher I can vouch for her artistic ability. She is an extremely talented artist and her expertise in utilizing the medium that she was using was clearly evident. The teacher

utilized a Smartboard, mixing images as well as definitions and examples on the board to reinforce whatever topic she may have been talking about at that time. I found myself genuinely interested in the lesson, not only by her presentation and enthusiasm, but her artistic ability was captivating. This was further evidenced by the fact that her students were mesmerized. I jotted down in my notes "Wagner's' work is excellent, effortless, students glued to whatever she is painting". The students respected that talent and looked up to her because she clearly established herself as an expert in her field.

The last teacher I observed, Mr. Maclay, teaches Algebra. In regards to his content knowledge my background as an art teacher was not much help, but his effortless delivery of the information, as well as how naturally he address and answered questions was impressive. When he went unto the main crux of the lesson he was methodical in his delivery of the information. His delivery of the content however was far from bland. He was animated, changed his tone and volume of his voice throughout the lesson and incorporated humor throughout his lesson. It was easily discernable that he was extremely knowledgeable in regards to the content, as answers were always answered thoroughly. He was able to make connections to individual students that seemed to help them come to conclusions on their own. You could easily tell he had established a relationship with these students, whether it was a reference to something humorous that happed in a prior class or just making students feel comfortable in what could be a very stressful class.

Preparation

The second theme that arose through my observations as well as my pre and post interviews conducted with these teachers was the preparation that went into their work. The teachers' individual lessons may have come across as seamless and at times effortless, but after lengthy discussion it was apparent that these teachers put in valuable time to prepare their lessons. Thought was put into almost every aspect and usually with variations on certain lessons planned for if so needed (ex: learning disability, class make-up, etc). Regardless of their experience level the three teachers all stated the importance on being prepared as a way of ensuring success.
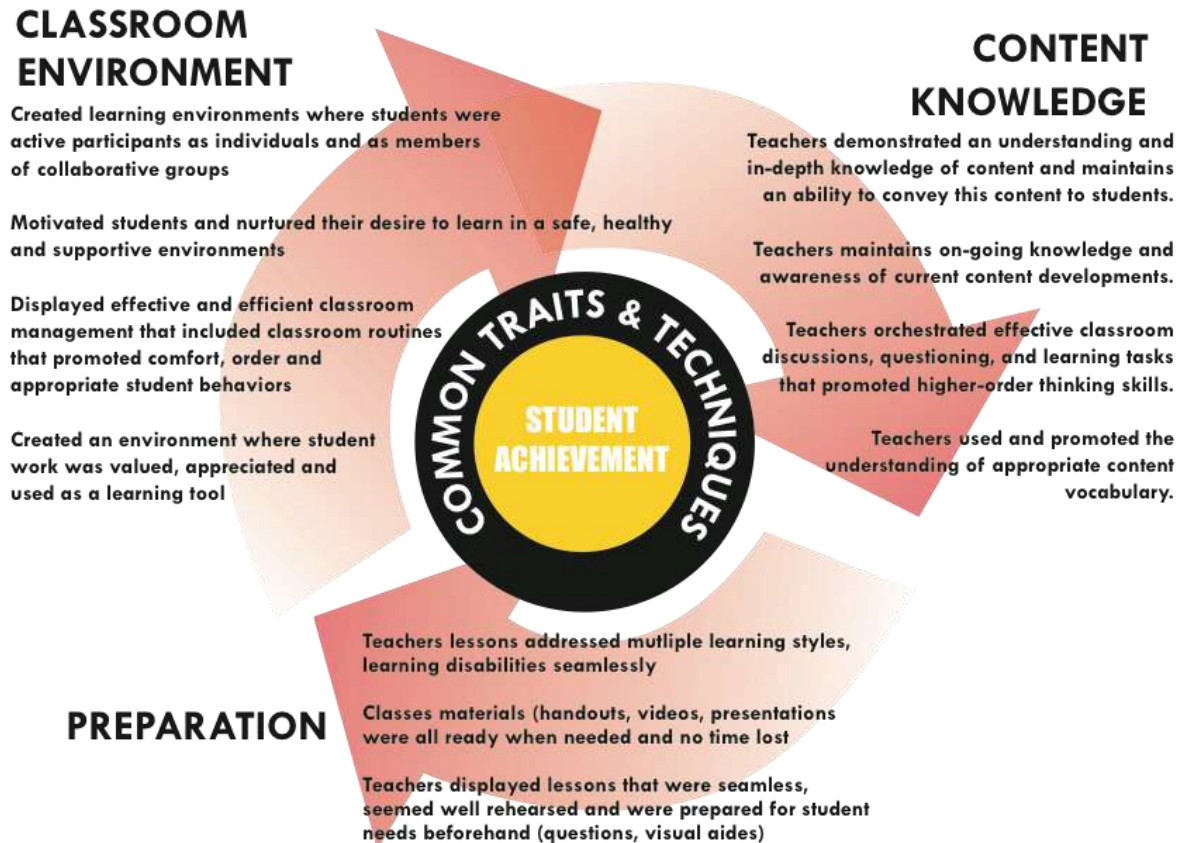
During Mr. Mein's AP History class, I remarked in my notes about the preparation that seemed to go into the lesson. This lesson was clearly not something that Mr. Mein had thrown together at the last minute. This was shown not only by the detailed PowerPoint presentation that accompanied his lecture, but also his breakdown of the class's activities throughout. It was evident that the teacher had gone to great lengths to make sure that his activities were varied but also catered to different types of learners. Visual aids were provided, handouts, videos were all evident throughout the lesson. Not only were multiple learners (visual, audio, kinesthetic) addressed but students were asked to participate not only as individuals but groups as well. It helped break the eighty-eight minutes long block up and never once did the class seem restless or tired of the class. According to Walker (2013) "The most effective teachers come to class each day ready to teach… Time flies in their classes because students are engaged in learning—i.e., not bored, less likely to fall asleep".

I was particularly interested in Mrs. Wagner's preparation as she is not only someone who I have great respect for as a teacher, but she is also an Art teacher. Being

that is my content area I was curious to see how she prepared and came up with her lessons. In our discussion prior to and after our observations, she explained how she is always trying new things, ideas and projects. She stated "I get ideas from anywhere, TV, magazines, online. If I see something I think may make a good project I'll try it out and see if I think it has any merit". Now someone who is not an Art teacher may not find that impressive, but the level of detail that goes into Mrs. Wagner's art lessons is sizable, and to put that much effort into crafting and creating a project that she may not eventually even use takes considerable time and effort. Mrs. Wagner went on to explain how for the class that I had observed she had tried to cater to the individual needs of students in her class. She had to plan for an ESL (English as second language) student, and visually impaired student as well as "a handful" of learning impaired students. She did this, she explained, by mixing techniques, and delivery methods as well as allowing time for individual instruction.

While at first glance Mr. Maclay's lesson didn't seem as in-depth as Mr. Mein's or Mrs. Wagner's, in discussing with him the class he revealed how what may seem to occur organically is sometimes coaxed from his students, through careful planning. He went on to explain how he will plan for situations in his class where students will not be able to come up with solutions on their own. Either through the complexity of the problem or an idea that hasn't been fully explained yet, he will make it so the students will have to either consult him or work together. He went on to describe the students in his class, and how he knew what students to push in these situations and how to get them to work in conjunction with the rest in order to come to a solution to a problem. This showed an impressive amount of thought that may go into a specific detail in a class,

where he will intentionally challenge his class in an attempt to spur collaboration and

problem solving.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Created learning environments where students were active participants as individuals and as members of collaborative groups

Motivated students and nurtured their desire to learn in a safe, healthy and supportive environments

Displayed effective and efficient classroom management that included classroom routines that promoted comfort, order and appropriate student behaviors

Created an environment where student work was valued, appreciated and used as a learning tool

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE

Teachers demonstrated an understanding and in-depth knowledge of content and maintains an ability to convey this content to students.

Teachers maintains on-going knowledge and awareness of current content developments.

Teachers orchestrated effective classroom discussions, questioning, and learning tasks that promoted higher-order thinking skills.

Teachers used and promoted the understanding of appropriate content vocabulary.

COMMON TRAITS & TECHNIQUES

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

PREPARATION

Teachers lessons addressed mutliple learning styles, learning disabilities seamlessly

Classes materials (handouts, videos, presentations were all ready when needed and no time lost

Teachers displayed lessons that were seamless, seemed well rehearsed and were prepared for student needs beforehand (questions, visual aides)

(Figure 3 common traits and techniques)

The three teachers each displayed an enthusiasm for their classes and it

showed in the way they discussed their ideas and attitudes towards coming up with the

lessons. While the three lessons were all unique, all three were well though out, planned

and executed by three teachers with various teaching styles. In the end, I felt each one

successfully reached their students and their distinctive styles helped each class be

successful. In looking for similarities and contrasts I found these teachers to share as

many connections as differences, as shown in the charts below.

Similarities		
Mr. Mein	Mrs. Wagner	Mr. Maclay
High Expectations		
Challenge Students		
Variety in Lessons		
Multiple learners addressed		
High degree of Content knowledge		
Students engaged		
Respect of the class		
Preparation		

Differences			
Teacher	Mr. Mein	Mrs. Wagner	Mr. Maclay
Teaching Style	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive
Student Involvement	Encouraged student involvement	Focus on teacher led instruction	Encouraged group collaboration
Focus during lesson	Students comfortable to ask questions	Students focus on completing assigned tasks	Students encouraged to work with peers
Presentation style	Teacher/Student guided	Teacher led	Student guided
Class Dynamic	Relaxed but focused	Quiet focus	Focused but Energetic

Classroom Environment

The third theme was that every teacher had established an environment where the classes were challenging, yet encouraging and in the sense that student participation was not only evident, but is some cases the driving element in parts of the class. Discussion among the students was encouraged as well and overall each teacher established a high

standard for their students. In the following sections, I will give examples that I found throughout the three observations.

During Mr. Mein's AP history class, it was clear that the atmosphere was very relaxed, evidenced by the fact that students were not afraid to ask questions as well as answer questions, even when they were not entirely sure of the answers. The enthusiasm of the class was refreshing to see. So often in a high school class environment apathy seems to be the norm, as students and teachers alike at times just try to get through the class. This was not evident as the Mr. Mein's delivery of the content and the students engagement seemed to keep everyone up and attentive throughout. The students seemed to relish the fact that they may be able to add something to the discussion and the teacher made sure to acknowledge and question the students throughout. The class was also extremely focused on the teacher throughout his lesson. I felt that this was due to the teachers delivery and how he infused humor into his presentation and this kept students upbeat but also allowed for brief moments of levity throughout an eighty eight minute long class.

From my first observation to the next one I saw a very different style in how two successful teachers can handle the classroom experience. In Mrs. Wagner's class I felt her role in the class was more of an authority figure. When I spoke with her about this, she replied that her class is not a democracy. She felt the best way for her to teach but also maintain control was acting as the central figure. Whereas Mr. Mein was relaxed, Mr. Maclay almost nurturing, Mrs. Wagner was an unabashed authoritarian. She repeatedly would tell students that they weren't trying hard enough, or that they were better then that. While on the outside the teacher may have seemed to be harsh, I watched

as these same students would go back to their seats and work on it, almost hyper focused on trying to get it right the next time. I almost felt that they were not working from intrinsic motivation, or a grade, as they were trying to get this teachers acknowledgement of a job well done. Her refusal to accept anything less than their best work seemed to motivate them. According to Marzano (2001) "rewarding students for simply performing a task does not enhance intrinsic motivation and might decrease it". She had established herself as the ultimate authority, but these students trusted her judgments as well as her knowledge of the content and worked all the harder for it.

The classroom environment for my third observation in Mr. Maclay's classroom was unique. While it was relaxed in the way Mr. Mein's class was, I saw the same effort from his students that I had witnessed in Wagner's room. When he went onto the main crux of the lesson he was methodical in his delivery of the information. His delivery of the information however was far from bland. He was animated, changed his tone and volume of his voice throughout the lesson and incorporated humor throughout his lesson. You could easily tell he had established a relationship with these students, whether it was a reference to something humorous that happed in a prior class or just making students feel comfortable in what could be a very stressful class.

At one point in his lesson, a particular student kept struggling with a specific idea relating to graphing the equations solution. I anticipated the teacher taking time to answer the students question while other students sat and waited for him to return to the lesson. What surprised me was the teacher's ability to incorporate what the student was confused about into the class, and used this as an opportunity. to not only help the student, but possibly come to a conclusion. I then began to realize that this teacher had created an

environment where the students were eager to help each other. They all gave their own opinions on how they understood the topic, and any tips or tricks that they have incorporated to help them understand difficult concepts. It was during this discussion that the teacher played to role of mediator, he simply guided the conversation and helped steer students back to the problem whenever he felt they were losing sight of the problem. It was such a comfortable atmosphere where students didn't appear scared to give wrong answers and they were eager to help each other.

Pros and Cons of Observation Forms

I used my districts observation forms (see appendix) throughout the observation to see how effective our form was in being able to capture all of the subtle nuances of a class. I felt that my districts form was extremely comprehensive but perhaps at a cost. Throughout the observation I found myself frantically trying to go through the sections present on our form in order to see if the teacher had shown proof of these traits. It was exhaustive as the form has seven categories, with each category containing six to ten examples. The form does an excellent job of covering the components that are measurable in a class, as it gives the observer the ability to rate on its seven categories and add comments as needed. Also the form itself focuses on positive traits observed. The form allows for the observer to remark about all of the positive aspects of the lesson, leaving any changes that the observer may feel are needed for a recommendations section. This way a teacher doesn't feel that there is a focus on the negative, but an affirmation of what is being done correctly, while constructive criticism is still allowed.

However after a few minutes I found myself focusing so much on trying to check off examples in each of these categories that I felt I wasn't really paying attention to the lesson itself. I wondered how someone could possibly find proof of all of these traits during a thirty-minute observation. Due to this I felt that our districts form was exhaustive, almost to a fault and that observers may find themselves focusing more on checking off a list then really being able to absorb what each teacher is doing in a class.

Pros and Cons of Current Observation Process	
Pros	Cons
Observation form focuses on postive traits Three thirty minute observations Performance standards clearly define components of effective teaching	Subjective - Only one Observer Time Consuming - Pre-observation, observation, post-observation, forms Scoring System - Putting a number on the effectivness of a teacher Limited Observation time - Observers not able to see whole lesson

(Figure 4: Pros and Cons of Observation Process)

Throughout all of the observations the teachers all employed various teaching styles. Through three observations I had witnessed one teacher that seemed to be more authoritarian than the others, while in one class the students played a more central role and yet a third teacher was confident enough to step back and let his students work out a problem on their own. Despite these differences the end goal of information being

passed on from teacher to class seemed to be evident. Students were engaged, working

hard and enjoying these classes. All in all I came away from these observations

reenergized. Watching these teachers work at their craft is such successful, nuanced yet

distinctive ways was motivating. I was excited to try new teaching styles and implement

what I had seen in their classes into my own but to also set a goal for myself to see if I am

working as hard as these teachers are.

Cons

While I found the entire observation procedure extremely insightful, along the

way I came across multiple issues that I felt are inherent in the observation process. The

first issue that I encountered was dealing with the time needed to observe classes. I felt

that the scheduling of the observations was problematic, as things such as state testing,

test taking in the class and teachers availability were major roadblocks. Even once the

observations were planned, given our block schedule each observation took eighty-eight

minutes. This had to be conducted during my free block and was therefore taking time

away form my own work in my classroom. As stated by Dr. Stronge (2007) the process

of observation is not without its flaws. As shown in the following chart the issues

concerning observations can be difficult to overcome, and seem to be inherent in the

observation process itself.

Data Source	Potential Benefits	Potential Liabilities
Observation	• Seeing is believing. • Frequent observations can be insightful and serve as an excellent catalyst for improvement.	• Can be artificial and not reflective of regular, ongoing teaching. • Time consuming if done properly.

(Figure 5: Benefits and Liabilities)

While the individual observations I conducted were informative and very useful, I was not there to judge the teacher. If I were an administrator conducting these observations, I am not sure I would feel confident passing judgment on someone based off of three observations, especially when my district only requires each observation to be thirty minutes. Would it really be possible to tell if someone was an effective or highly effective teacher off a thirty-minute snapshot of a single class? Could one person really be able to fully assess everything that is presented in thirty minutes, and what if something he or she feels maybe missing from the lesson was addressed after they left?

Discussion

So now as I move forward after my observations I find myself excited by the opportunity this research now affords me. I have been able to put to bed questions and doubts that I have had about my own teaching, such as, "Am I successfully managing my class?", while finding out what changes I should make going forward, for example putting more time into my lesson planning. Having the chance to watch other teachers allowed me to see not only how effective teachers work with a class, but also how they handled themselves outside of the class, putting together lessons and preparing themselves for future classes. I was impressed with how these teachers handled themselves throughout the challenges of a typical class, managing outburst from students and handling multiple different types of learners. However their knowledge of their

content and time spent in preparation for their classes were two issues that I feel I have to improve upon in my own teaching.

Self Improvement

Each one of the teachers I observed were dedicated to their craft, and it was evident in their content knowledge. Their mastery of the content allowed for them to adjust to the needs of their students as their class progressed, but it was their preparation in crafting their lessons that impacted me most. After listening to them in formal and informal meetings discussing not only what they were teaching but how much time they dedicated to it was impressive. One teacher stated that he routinely spends up to "two to three hours planning, reading and putting together my lessons on most nights". I had to ask myself was I really putting in the time to crafting lessons that were not only meaningful but interesting as well. As one teacher said to me in a pre-conference meeting, "This is my stage, and I'm putting on three shows a day".

While I am convinced this will make a change for the better in my teaching, I have also decided to take up one of the teachers I observed on something she offered after our observation. We have agreed to meet once a week during our prep for an hour. During this time we discussed plans, teaching strategies and talked about how our classes were going in general. It has been a huge help to have someone to bounce ideas off of and receive legitimate advice and constructive criticism when I need it. I look forward to this time spent with her not only because it is a huge help for me, but because it allows for me to vent some of my frustrations and fears.

Professional Learning Communities

As a next step, I plan on putting together a PLC (Professional Learning Community) with a number of my fellow teachers. I am looking to open up this community to other teachers in my content area in hopes of streamlining our classes, sharing ideas as well as establishing a line of communication with each other. I hope to use my research not only as a means of professional development but also as a tool to possibly motivate my district to make changes. Unfortunately, peer observation is something that is not implemented in many school districts in New Jersey. I think that this research could at least start a conversation about the benefits of peer observation in my school. If teachers could be shown the benefits of the peer observation process, I feel that they might just change open up to the idea of not only opening their doors to other teachers, but also conducting observations of their own. This process could be used as a form of professional development and as a way to incentivize teachers as well.

New Teachers

As a new teacher starting out the ability to conduct peer observations with a group of well-established and experienced teachers would be a tremendous opportunity. I know how much it would have benefitted me, coming right from student teaching and still very much unsure of what awaited me. Offering this in combination with a mentoring program could be an effective way to not only help new teachers adjust and

learn the ropes but also as a way to establish relationships across disciplines as well as age ranges. Giving teachers the chance to see what other teachers are doing can inspire and motivate them to improve what they are doing in their classrooms, and find ways to work together across curriculums in new and exciting ways. In my experience at my school, the teachers here have always been more than willing to help each other, the issue has been giving them the time and opportunity to work together. A peer observation program could go a long way towards solving these issues. Putting creative people together in an environment where they can learn from each other can only help foster advancements and create fruitful professional relationships.

If an environment can be fostered where the observation can be seen as a valid form of professional development then I think that we can start slowly changing teachers feeling towards the observational process. While I understand why teachers feel a sense of apprehension concerning the observation process, my hope is that teachers learn to open our doors to our peers, take the emphasis off of judging and place it more on professional development we can start to change that perception. It may be hard for established teachers to make this change but if a generation of new teachers were to start with peer observations being the norm, imagine the advantage that these teachers would have.

Obstacles

In the education field the process of the observation is one that is met with animosity at worst and skepticism at best. The process of watching someone do their job

for a single class, one day out of an entire school year, and then deciding whether they

are capable at their job from that single observation seems ridiculous when looked at

from a distance. Because there is so much riding on the observation process today, many

teachers have developed a disdain for the process, with sleepless nights spent worrying

about lessons and question regarding whether or not their class will behave that specific

day. On top of that working in what can be a high stress environment already this

observational effect unfortunately puts an undue amount of stress on teachers. I for one

can attest to the fact that often this observational effect can often have a negative impact

on me in the classroom. Very few people work well under high stress and despite

administration consistently stating that they are "not out to get us" there still remains a

fair amount of apprehension when allowing someone into your class.

Because of this when I decided to finally conduct peer observations I was worried

that I would encounter some pushback from my fellow teachers. Teaching is an art, and

no two people teach the same way. Therefore when we are being observed we often times

we can assume that we are being judged as good or bad. This often this may be unfair to

the observer, and can put teachers at odds with those who are observing them. So imagine

my concern when I now had to find fellow teachers that would allow me into their classes

to observe them teaching.

I asked a total of nine teachers if they were comfortable with my observing of

their classes. Of those nine two flat out said that they wouldn't be interested. I found that

to be disconcerting but I respected their right and moved on. The rest of the teachers

asked all agreed to the process, with four telling me I could drop in anytime and the last

three telling me that they were willing but that they would let me know when it would be

a good time. However when I had more discussion with the teachers and informed them of what the process would entail, a pre observation meeting, the observation itself and finally a post observation and that I would be using the observation for a research paper, I saw that many of them suddenly were not as interested in being part of my research. Whether it was just putting off the date or not returning emails four of the remaining teachers made it obvious that they were not going to be apart of this process. The remaining three teachers were more than helpful and ended up becoming the three teachers that I observed.

I am not certain what this says about those teachers that refused or those that accepted me willingly into their classes. It would be unfair for me to say that those teachers who refused had something to hide, or that the teachers who let me observe were automatically better teachers. It does however speak to the atmosphere regarding teacher observations and the negative connotation that some teachers still associate with them. After my research and seeing how beneficial the peer observation research was my hope is now that over time districts see the value in peer observations. The implementation of peer observations cannot only be helpful to both the observer and teacher, but may help alleviate the stress normally associated with the observational process.

Emerging Questions

Now as I look back the research I have conducted I am confronted with multiple questions. When I started the research I looked at the process from my own viewpoint. I was looking for answers to my own questions, how do effective teachers teach? How

could I improve as a teacher from my observations? What will peer observation mean for my classroom? Now that I have completed the research I know turn my attention to the observation process in general. When I conducted my observation it wasn't with the intention on judging good teachers vs. bad teachers and marking out differences. My goal was to watch and pick what I felt were the strategies and teaching methods that I could use and apply in my own teaching. Now I began to wonder how does an administrator view the observation process, and can you really fully judge a teacher based on a very narrow viewing window.

My district conducts three thirty-minute observations throughout the course of the year. It is based off of these observations that administration determines a teachers overall rating. It is based off this rating scale whether or not a teacher will be retained or not. As I look back at the observations that I conducted, I try to imagine if I could have possibly been able to rate one of those teachers based off of just thirty minutes. I feel that so much happened throughout the entire class that to try and capture an idea of what that teacher is capable of in thirty minutes almost borders on impossible. Could an administrator really tell if a teacher was highly successful based on this small a sample size? Not only that but the amount that observers are asked to critique seems overwhelming given the time constraints. According to The New Teacher Project Issue Analysis Report (2013),

> "Observers are often expected to rate teachers on every aspect of performance that the state or district wants to evaluate, in addition to providing detailed feedback that can help teachers address specific development area - all in the space of a single class period. It is unrealistic and inefficient to ask observers to rate a

teacher's professionalism, continuing education or any other unobservable performance area each time they visit a classroom."

These questions again bring up reason why there still remains so much apprehension regarding the observation process to this day. Even using my own school districts observation forms I was overwhelmed in trying to look for everything that an observer would be trying to check for in a lesson, and I was in for an entire block. I could only imagine the pressure to try and find examples for all the traits listed. After a while I could see how these forms simply become a checklist, with observers simply looking for specific things and not focusing on what a teacher may actually be struggling with.

I witnessed firsthand how observations helped me personally, but I wondered about the effectiveness for the teacher being observed. Through my own experience I have witnessed administration struggle with their ability to give timely honest feedback. Often I feel that observers have been simply trying to fill out a checklist and once that is done they really feel that there is nothing else to add. Even as I tried my best to make sure I was seeing every teaching trait that was listed on the observation I would routinely lose my place in the lesson for a moment. My observations took up the entire class period, eighty-eight minutes, and I still found it hard to keep track of everything that the form was asking me. How could someone who is objectively observing a class possibly pick up everything in just a thirty-minute observation? Below is just one section of the observation form, notice how the main category then has nine separate traits that observers are supposed to find specific examples of in a thirty minute period. Keep in mind that this is merely one of seven total categories.

3. Instructional Delivery

The teacher effectively engages students in learning by using a variety of instructional strategies in order to meet individual learning needs.

- Effective introduction is utilized
- Establishes clear and measurable objectives
- Prior knowledge and skills are effectively activated
- Effective and varied instructional strategies are used (CITW)
- Directions are clear and concise
- Modeling enhances understanding
- Differentiation of process and/or product is evident
- Students are asked to reason effectively, solve problems, communicate clearly, and collaborate with others
- An effective lesson closure is utilized

Instructional Delivery Evidence:

Future research should look into how effective this form is in truly allowing observers to conduct a thorough observation, given the amount of time constraints that present themselves. Perhaps future research could also examine how to possibly streamline this form so that observers could focus more on being in the moment and not having to concentrate on simply checking off items on a list.

Conclusion

All of my research started with a simple question, how can peer observation impact my own teaching? In the end, looking back at my journals, I think I was simply looking to justify what I was doing in my classroom was good enough. After getting a chance to see how first-rate teachers go about crafting lessons, the energy they put into their craft and they time they spend preparing themselves, I see that I was simply not putting enough into my own classes. This research has shown me what it is going to take to be the teacher that I have always wanted to be. It was a hard pill to swallow, to admit that I was not as good as I needed to be. But self-reflection sometimes isn't easy and self improvement almost always requires hard work. Now the only question the remains for

me is am I willing to work as hard as this is going to require? I feel that this research has energized me and lit a fire in me, and I know that I am already working on crafting new lessons as well as working with some of my other teachers.

Impact

My research has helped me created a personal challenge, and now for the first time in a while I have a goal that I am going to work towards. In a sense it is a challenge to myself, can I fulfill my potential as a teacher, or at the very least give my all in trying to attain it? I'm the only one with the answers to those questions, and I know that I am excited by the prospect and motivated by my fellow teachers. It was getting a chance to see someone work at his or her craft at a high level that motivated me to be better. If not for getting the chance to conduct this research I might have just stayed in my class and gone through the motions, not challenging myself or trying to improve.

I am also going to ask that some of the teachers that I had the opportunity to observe now take the chance to observe my class. Getting honest and timely advice and constructive criticism from peers that I already have great respect for is something that can only help improve my own teaching. It will be something that I am sure will be frightening at first. The act of allowing someone into my room and then being honest enough with myself as a teacher to accept that I am not perfect and listen to what my peers have to say about my teaching is intimidating. I am nervous about what they may say but confident that they are knowledgeable enough to give me sound advice and constructive criticism.

The concept of peer observation as a form of professional development is something that I intend on bringing to my schools administration. After seeing how much it has helped and impacted me I believe it can be a huge help to others as well. Not only can peer observation help improve individual teachers, young and old, it helps foster interdisciplinary communication as well as establishes teacher relationships. After all what is a school if not a community? If peer observation can help build and nurture that community we would be foolish not to implement some form of it.

Appendices

Implementation Plan

Now that I am armed with this new information I plan to share my research with my administration as well as my fellow teachers. By doing so I hope to start to change the attitudes towards observations in my school and district. I am going to have to do this tactfully given the existing climate in my school when it comes to observations. There is such a negative association with the observation process that if I were to come out and announce that I felt that everyone should not only welcome others freely into their classes, but also demand that they now have to conduct observations I would probably end up making zero headway, as well as a few enemies.

So knowing this, how do I move forward? I plan by moving in small steps, by sharing my information gradually and creating a positive atmosphere for peer observations organically. The only way teachers in my school would accept this is if they came to the realization that this can help them on their own. I know personally when I feel forced to do something that I tend to do whatever it may be begrudgingly. By changing attitudes and informing people I feel that my fellow teachers may come to decide that they want to conduct peer observations of their own accord. By trying to create and then foster an atmosphere where teachers feel that conducting peer observations are not only helpful, but fulfill a need in my school (professional development hours) I can possibly see change come about, albeit slowly.

Administration

My first step is to share my information with my department supervisor. He is that I respect and also someone that I feel will listen to my opinions and be open to looking at my research. After he has had a chance to review my research and explain to him the impact it has had on me, he could be pivotal in taking my research to next level, in this case my principal. My principal is young, thoughtful and has focused on improving the atmosphere in my school, and has not been afraid to shake things up in his short tenure. Whether it was giving people chances when he felt they were ready for new positions, or implementing new learning programs in our school, he is someone who will not simply brush off a new idea simply because its "new".

Coworkers

Now I am not assuming that once I have had a chance to present my finding to him he will simply institute a school wide peer observation program. He is smarter than that and I feel that would be too jarring a change regardless. The idea of peer observation as a school wide program is something has to begin at smaller levels and grow organically. What I am hoping for is the chance to set it up in my department as a trail run. My school currently employs over one hundred teachers, but my department only has 4 people in it at this time. By starting slowly with the members of my department I feel that I can start the foundations for what could slowly turn into something that other teachers and eventually departments begin to emulate. By sharing my information with

my colleagues in a one on one setting, as well as possibly through a presentation at one of our monthly department meeting I can start to inform them on peer observation, and how we can start as a department to implement it. I don't intent to for this to be mandatory, instead I am hoping for people to be willing to participate of their free will, and let talk spread about the program naturally.

New Teacher Programs

Another option for implementing peer observations could be incorporating it into our new teacher program. Currently new teachers attend a three-day workshop and are assigned a mentor; a fellow teacher in their department who offers to answer questions for the new teacher and helps guide them through their first year. In addition to these two programs perhaps new teachers could be given time throughout the year to observe fellow teachers. The opportunity in to see how seasoned veterans handle a classroom, come up with lessons would have been something that I would have greatly appreciated, and probably needed when I first started teaching.

I don't think that peer observation, as a school wide program, is going to immediately take off. I feel that many teachers just are not going to be convinced of its merits. I believe that some teachers have no interest in self-analysis, and believe that they do not need to conduct observations. Other teachers will not doubt be against the idea of letting people into their classrooms. As a teacher I know how personal a classroom can become and the idea of all of a sudden opening your doors to your peers throughout the year may not be something that many teachers would want to commit to. In order to

offset this I plan on asking my department supervisor as well as my principal if peer observations may possibly be an activity that can go towards my schools professional development hours.

Professional Development

Each year we are required to fulfill twenty hours worth of professional development, and activities such as teacher workshops, seminars and college courses all go towards fulfilling those hours. If my district were to allow peer observations to count towards those professional development hours than perhaps we could convince some teachers to take part in the observation process. Over time we could possibly start to change the culture of my school, especially with new teachers. I know that some of the older staff members may never come around to the idea of peer observation, but if new teachers came into a school and were introduced to the idea off the bat, then maybe we can help remove the stigma that surround observations. By removing the negative atmosphere from the beginning of their careers, then we can slowly start to change the culture of the school, and over time start to see a change in the culture.

I am not naïve and realize that this is something that may never be achieved. But I believe in the merits of peer observation and I think that given time and by slowly winning people over to the idea of not only conducting observations, but also letting others into observe my class, the school could start to see small changes in attitude. If something like peer observation can help me become a better teacher, then my students

are the ones who will truly reap the rewards. We stress to our student to become lifelong learners, and as teachers we have to make sure that we practice what we preach.

Subjectivity

Throughout this Masters program I have learned so much. I have been introduced to new ideas, new ways of thinking, new people and been forced to take an honest look at myself throughout this whole process. The culmination of this program, the research project, was not something that I looked forward to. My own personal bias towards writing, (I am an art teacher) and having so much riding on this was daunting. Also the idea for my research project was something that excited and also scared me. My papers look at peer observation was going to force me to compare myself to other teachers. I was finally going to be able to measure myself against my peers and see how I measured up alongside them. Not something that I was excited about given my tendency toward self-doubt. I was sure that I was going to walk away thinking I was an awful teacher and that my peers would judge me as one.

However what I learned is that I am a good teacher. But I feel the most important thing is that I learned how much I have to grow as a teacher. Prior to conducting my observations I was very much isolated. I worked in my class and went about my business without much interaction with my fellow teachers. Conducting this research forced me to work with other teachers. What I have learned through this is that I actually enjoy the process of collaboration. It was refreshing to bounce thoughts off of others as well as listen to what they had to offer in the way of new ideas. I had never felt that I would

benefit from that type interaction, I have always considered myself more of an introvert, but I saw how others went about creating lessons, teaching and applying techniques and it was incredibly motivating.

That motivation was not something that I was planning on. I assumed that I would finish my observations, write about them for my paper and move on back to my room and continue business as usual. But after watching my fellow teachers I was instantly moved to want to try these new techniques I was observing. I was confident that I would be able to incorporate the strategies and styles that they utilized in their classes, and I imagined how well they could work in mine. I could see myself being a better teacher as I was watching them, envisioning myself in my own class. All the time thinking about how I was denying myself such a chance at improving by being so isolated all these years. The worst part about that realization was that it was my own fault. I had been so nervous about whether or not I was teaching "the right way" that I never bothered to ask anyone for help. I think I was scared they would think I was an awful teacher, or didn't know what I was doing. Conducting the research helped shatter that false belief and open up new doors for me

Although so much was positive came through this project, I had to deal with some harsh truths as well. The hardest part about this research project was what I found out about myself through the process. I'm not working hard enough as a teacher. Writing that out in my journals was one of the hardest things I've done in my professional career. I have prided myself on my ability to be successful as a teacher, but I think that when I compare myself to these teachers who are highly effective I see that the number of hours they spend on developing ideas and working on teaching strategies is a huge part of their

success. Accepting this I have begun to spend more time working on my plans, coming

up with new activities as well as experimenting with my teaching strategies.

When I look back at this long journey, I see that I am not the same person I was

before I started. I can honestly say that I have looked at myself as a teacher, done some

soul searching and realized a couple things. One, I thoroughly enjoy teaching, and it is

something that I want to get better at. This research has allowed me to analyze my

personal teaching style, compare that to others and implement those techniques and ideas

into my own style. Second I have spent so long not asking for help or afraid to that I

created a barrier between my coworkers and myself. Teaching is very much an art and I

know through my own experience that amazing artwork can come as a result of

collaboration. Moving forward I plan on utilizing my opportunities to work

collaboratively with my peers, as I now enjoy that sense of camaraderie and realized the

value it brings to my own classroom.

Stronge Standards - Effective versus Highly Effective Chart

Standard	Effective	Highly Effective	Questions to Consider for Highly Effective Rating
1 Professional Knowledge	The teacher demonstrates an understanding of the curriculum, subject content, and the developmental needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.	In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher **consistently** demonstrates **extensive** knowledge of the subject matter and **continually** enriches the curriculum.	How does the teacher go above and beyond in contributing to the enrichment of the curriculum and providing unique educational experiences for all students?
2 Instructional Planning	The teacher plans using the state's standards, the school's curriculum, effective strategies, resources, and data to meet the needs of all students.	In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher **actively** seeks and uses **alternative** data and resources and **consistently differentiates** plans to meet the needs of all students.	How does the teacher find and use alternative data and design lessons to meet the individual needs of all students on an ongoing basis?
3 Instructional Delivery	The teacher effectively engages students in learning by using a variety of instructional strategies in order to meet individual learning needs.	In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher **optimizes** students' opportunity to learn by engaging them in **higher order thinking** and/or **enhanced performance skills.**	How do the students demonstrate higher-order thinking through authentic, real-world, and/or hands-on products on a consistent basis? How does the teacher elicit higher-order answers from all students?
4 Assessment of and for Student Learning	The teacher systematically gathers, analyzes, and uses all relevant data to measure student academic progress, guide instructional content and delivery methods, and provide **timely feedback to both students and parents throughout the year.**	In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher uses a **variety** of **informal and formal** assessments based on intended learning outcomes to assess student learning and **teaches students how to monitor their own academic progress**	How does the teacher communicate to students and parents the ways in which various assessments connect to student learning and to students' overall performance? How does the teacher help students set their own goals for learning and then monitor and adjust them based on outcomes?
5 Learning Environment	The teacher uses resources, routines, and procedures to provide a respectful, positive, safe, student-centered environment that is conducive to learning.	In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher creates a **dynamic** learning environment that **maximizes learning opportunities** and minimizes disruptions within an environment in which students **self-monitor** behavior.	How does the classroom exemplify a positive learning environment where success and learning from failure are both welcome? How do students take responsibility for both individual and group learning?
6 Professionalism	The teacher maintains a commitment to professional ethics, communicates effectively, and takes responsibility for, and participates in, professional growth that results in enhanced student learning.	In addition to meeting the standard, the teacher continually engages in **high level** personal/professional growth and **application** of skills, and **contributes to the development of others** and the well-being of the school.	How does the teacher, on a consistent basis, contribute to the development of his or her colleagues, the department, the school, and/or the district? How does this contribution lead to improved student outcomes?

TPES Pre-Observation Conference Record

School:

Grade/Class/Level:

Conference Date:

• At what point in the unit is the lesson being taught?

• What is the primary intellectual point of the work?

☐ Acquisition of discrete skill or knowledge

☐ Meaning-making: students must make inferences, interpretations, and/or generalizations

☐ Transfer of Learning: students must apply their repertoire to a new format, task, or situation with minimal scaffold

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2. Describe the population of the class.

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3. Are your objectives clear and measurable?

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4. What instructional strategies did you choose?

☐ Feedback/Recognition/Effort

☐ Cues/Questions

☐ Non-Linguistic Representation

☐ Summarizing

☐ Note-Taking

☐ Identifying Similarities & Differences

☐ Generating & Testing Hypotheses

☐ Practice

Why did you choose these strategies?

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5. How are the assessments tied to the objectives?

---

6. What are the expected outcomes of this lesson?

7. How is the content relevant and rigorous?

8. In this lesson, students will be asked to (21st century skills):

☐ Reason Effectively   ☐ Solve Problems

☐ Communicate Effectively   ☐ Collaborate with Others

9. What are the areas of concern or improvement based on previous formal and/or informal observations, the professional development plan, etc.?

10. What would you like the evaluator to focus on in this lesson?

11. Upload lesson plan below.

Artifacts					▲
Name	Date Uploaded	Upload User	File		

TPES Formal Classroom Observation Form

Classroom Observation Form 1

Date Observed: [   ]

Time/Period: [   ]

# of Students: [   ]

Observer's Name: [   ]

The teacher is:

○ Non-tenured   ○ Tenured

1. Professional Knowledge

The teacher demonstrates an understanding of the curriculum, subject content, and the developmental needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.

- Command of subject is evident
- Key vocabulary, concepts, and/or principles are clearly explained
- Real world examples and applications are used
- Content is relevant and/or rigorous

Professional Knowledge Evidence:

[   ]

File List

File Name	Date Uploaded	Size		

2. Instructional Planning

The teacher plans using the state's standards, the school's curriculum, effective strategies, resources, and data to meet the needs of all students.

- Effective planning evident (lesson plans, interdisciplinary, differentiation, pacing, etc.)
- Effective and/or varied materials/technology resources are used
- Appropriate context (individual, small or group, pairs, etc.)
- Uses student learning data to guide planning (diagnostics, quarterlies, etc.)
- Applicable MHRD curriculum and NJCCCS/CCSS are addressed

Instructional Planning Evidence:

[   ]

File List

File Name	Date Uploaded	Size		

3. Instructional Delivery

The teacher effectively engages students in learning by using a variety of instructional strategies in order to meet individual learning needs.

- Effective introduction is utilized
- Establishes clear and measurable objectives
- Prior knowledge and skills are effectively activated
- Effective and varied instructional strategies are used (CITW)
- Directions are clear and concise
- Modeling enhances understanding
- Differentiation of process and/or product is evident
- Students are asked to reason effectively, solve problems, communicate clearly, and collaborate with others
- An effective lesson closure is utilized

Instructional Delivery Evidence:

File List

File Name	Date Uploaded	Size	

4. Assessment Of and For Learning

The teacher systematically gathers, analyzes, and uses all relevant data to measure student academic progress, guide instructional content and delivery methods, and provide timely feedback to both students and parents throughout the school year.

- Uses appropriate questioning techniques
- Appropriate application of skills is elicited (Bloom's Taxonomy)
- Regularly assesses for understanding and adjusts accordingly
- Guided practice and independent activities reinforce learning
- Assessment is aligned to objectives
- Gives constructive and frequent feedback to students on their learning
- Uses pre-assessment data to develop expectations for students, to differentiate instructions, and to document learning
- Appropriate homework is assigned and clearly explained

Assessment Of and For Learning Evidence:

File List

File Name	Date Uploaded	Size	

5. Learning Environment

The teacher uses resources, routines, and procedures to provide a respectful, positive, safe, student-centered environment that is conducive to learning.

- Class time is efficiently used (i.e., pacing, routines, transitions)
- Most students are actively engaged
- Students understand and adhere to classroom rules and procedures
- High standards of behavior are set for self and others
- Positive student-teacher rapport is evident

- Positive student-student rapport is evident
- Teacher has classroom presence and displays poise and confidence
- A safe and positive learning environment is maintained
- Teacher energy and enthusiasm are evident

Learning Environment Evidence:

File List

File Name	Date Uploaded	Size		

6. Professionalism

The teacher maintains a commitment to professional ethics, communicates effectively, and takes responsibility for and participates in professional growth that results in enhanced student learning.

- Maintains professional relationships with students, colleagues, and parents
- Respects diversity in the classroom
- Immediately notifies administration if student is a danger to self or others (bullying, under the influence, suicide ideation, threats, etc.)
- Implements all instructional and non-instructional responsibilities as specified in district, building, and departmental policies and procedures (professional dress, on time arrival, checks email, updates Edline, accurately takes attendance, etc.)
- Maintains a system of accurate records, which is efficient and tracks student progress
- Submits all paperwork (grades, lesson plans, IEP input, etc) within established deadlines
- Handles responsibilities and tasks promptly, efficiently, and consistently
- Communicates effectively with students, parents, and staff
- Actively participates in and learns from professional growth opportunities

File List

File Name	Date Uploaded	Size		

7. Student Academic Progress

The work of the teacher results in acceptable, measurable, and appropriate student academic progress.

- Sets acceptable, measurable, and appropriate achievement goals for student learning progress based on baseline data.
- Documents the progress of each student throughout the year.
- Provides evidence that achievement goals have been met, including the state-provided growth measure when available as well as other measures of student growth.
- Uses available performance outcome data to continually document and communicate student progress and develop interim learning targets.

File List

File Name	Date Uploaded	Size		

Additional Comments

Observer's Name:

Date:

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