

## **Teaching Pre-service Teachers to Become Reflective Observers of Their Own Practice**

Self-reflection is an important skill for novice teachers when they are finally in their own classroom without the intense supervision that accompanies student teaching. While professors and cooperating teachers may encourage their pre-service music education students to become more reflective through journaling and other means, video-recordings can be a particularly useful tool (Beck, King & Marshall, 2002; Powell, 2016; West, 2012).

To gain the most benefit from analysis of a video-recording, pre-service teachers need to know how to identify effective teaching (Beck, King & Marshall, 2002). Often, they are asked to observe their cooperating teachers. However, effective teaching is not easy or simple to identify, as a skilled teacher can make it appear so seamless that the subtleties are easily missed by the unpracticed eye. Initial observations by pre-service teachers can end up being “superficial,” lacking in specificity and perception (Snyder, 2011). While some suggest taking a very open-ended approach to guiding pre-service teachers to review and reflect on video-recorded teaching episodes (Snyder, 2011), others advocate for a more structured approach, providing sequential practice to guide the student to identify effective teaching (Beck, King & Marshall, 2002; West, 2012). Literature on teacher observation also provides some ideas that are helpful to designing an approach appropriate for pre-service teachers (Bergee, 1992; Danielson, 2007; Doerksen, 2006, Hamann & Gillespie, 2009; Madsen & Yarbrough, 1985; Nolan & Hoover, 2008.) Following are some suggestions for cooperating teachers and supervisors of pre-service music educators that may be helpful in developing more awareness of effective teaching, improved observation skills, and ultimately, more reflective thinking in our pre-service teachers.

As teachers, we know that complex concepts are best understood when we break them down into smaller, more digestible components. While observing the cooperating teacher, ask the pre-service teacher to focus on one aspect of teaching at a time, beginning with what is easiest to observe – the teacher’s actions. How is the teacher using her voice? What is his body posture and body language conveying? How is she using eye contact? What is the teacher’s energy level like? How is he using the physical space of the classroom?

Next ask them to focus solely on the students. What is the students’ behavior like? Do they appear engaged and responsive? How do you know? What can be learned about the instruction from observing the students’ behavior? How are the students responding to the physical environment? Are there student behaviors that the teacher missed or ignored? If ignored, can you tell why the teacher made that choice? How are the students responding to management cues? Instruction? What in the students’ behavior tells you that the lesson was successful? Unsuccessful? How do you know?

After examining the more easily observable actions of both the teacher and the students, ask the pre-service teacher to focus on the teaching sequence and instruction. Was the lesson sequenced well? How do you know? What procedures contributed to/detracted from student learning? Why? How effective were the choices of activities, materials, resources, etc., and were they age/developmentally appropriate? What made them so, or not so, and how do you know? Did the teacher depart from the lesson plan, and if so, why? Was this a good decision and if so, why? How do you know? How do you know the students met the objectives of the class? How did the teacher assess learning formatively throughout the class? How did the teacher assess

learning summatively? In what ways did the teacher differentiate for different types of learners, special needs students and/or ELL students? What applications of Universal Design were used? How did the teacher use questioning? How is the teacher encouraging critical thinking?

Finally, ask the pre-service teacher to focus on how the teacher is applying his/her musicianship in the classroom. What content knowledge did the teacher need for this class? What performance skills did the teacher use in this class? Did the teacher detect musical errors when they occurred, diagnose the problem, and help the students solve the problem? How? If not, can you tell why not? How did musicianship and performance skills add to/detract from the success of the class? What non-verbal teacher actions were utilized for musical communication and instruction? This will be particularly important in ensemble rehearsals. Was questioning used to elicit musically performed answers, and if so, was this effective? Was musical modeling used, and if so, how? Was it an effective instructional choice? Why? What instructional strategies did the teacher use that you might see only in a music class? What musicianship skills are required to teach general/instrumental/choral music? What does this tell you about what is required to become a music teacher, and why it might be important to continue to develop and maintain your own musicianship skills?

After practicing observation while focusing on each of the above four areas, the pre-service teacher may then be ready to synthesize it all into a summary observation. What evidence supports the degree of success of the lesson, based on their observations? If they were teaching/re-teaching this lesson, what might they do differently? Why?

Once pre-service teachers have had an opportunity to closely observe their cooperating teacher and practice their skills of observation, they can then apply this same strategy to a video-recording of their own teaching episode. By viewing their video multiple times, and through multiple lenses, they will begin to see in more detail exactly where they need to make changes. On the first viewing, pre-service teachers often become so focused on their appearance and their behaviors that they overlook the response of the students in front of them! By asking them to focus first on themselves, and then solely on the students in a separate viewing, they begin to more clearly see how their actions and presence influence the students and how to “read” the students’ behavior in response to the teacher’s actions. As they focus on the teaching sequence in a third viewing, they may notice that their lesson plan feels quite different in the context of presenting it than it does on paper. Additionally, they may find that different groups of students respond differently to the same instruction. By focusing on the sequence of the lesson as it unfolds, pre-service teachers start to see where they may be missing an important step that would enhance the success of the lesson, or may be able to identify other weaknesses/strengths in their planning. Music education students often lose sight of how much they are using their pedagogical content knowledge in the classroom, and how often they need to utilize their musicianship skills. By asking them to focus on this aspect in a fourth viewing, they begin to become more aware of the complexity of being an educator, a musician, and a music educator. At this point, the students will have gathered evidence from multiple viewings that will enable them to construct a holistic view of the lesson. They will be able to pinpoint exactly where they need to focus their attention as they revise and prepare for their next teaching episode.

This sequential approach provides pre-service teachers with the skills to identify the evidence they need to make specific and real change in their teaching. Their reflections become more focused, detailed, and perceptive. Because they have learned how to analyze their own instruction, they become more independent, self-sufficient and reflective in their teaching.

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