

**TO:** Carolyn Heier  
**FROM:** Victoria Helander-Heiser  
**RE:** 24 October observation  
**DATE:** 31 October 2013

During this visit I was able to observe you in two different instructional settings. The first class was a lab session in which students were completing posters which reflected their understanding of symbolism. I noticed you had clearly posted the day's activities on the front board and also provided students with a rubric for their posters.

The class was divided into partners, and students settled quickly into their work. You walked around the classroom to check on the status of their posters and provided added direction where necessary. In a couple of the partner groups, it was evident that one student was primarily responsible for the completion of the project. Have you thought about how you will handle that when grading the students' work? I was happy to hear you say that this poster project was the direct result of students initially not grasping what symbolism was. Good for you that you recognized their struggles but, more importantly, kudos for creating a project that allowed students to grasp the concept through a different means of interaction with the topic.

I was very pleased that you provided students with two different books to read and interact with. You noted that your more advanced students were reading The Pigman, and your struggling learners were working with The Outsiders. This certainly addresses the importance of differentiation in the classroom and, of course, this is something you will need to continue to do throughout your teaching experience. There are a couple of things you might want to consider, however, as you reflect of the effectiveness of this lesson.

First, while I applaud your use of a rubric, I thought the rubric itself didn't really help students focus on the learning aspect of the assignment. The rubric addressed the categories of "use of class time, graphics-originality, and attractiveness" of the poster itself. Only one rubric centered on "content." You could have placed more emphasis on this category and also expanded the criteria that you were looking for in the content of the posters. Rubrics are certainly a useful tool for students because they help students focus on what is important in a particular learning goal.

Second, look for opportunities for students to "report out" on their work. Especially when you are combining the creative with the cognitive aspect of a student, allowing students to share their work with their peers will give all students a chance "to

shine” in the classroom setting. It wasn’t clear to me what the ultimate use of the posters would be, but I would certainly suggest giving your students the opportunity to share their finished projects with their peers as yet another review of what symbolism is.

The second observed class allowed students to spend time working on a writing assignment while you met with students in small groups to discuss the use of dialogue in writing. Small group work is tremendously effective. It gives those students, who may not be comfortable asking questions or sharing their work in a large class, a smaller, safer venue for their self-expression. Your small groups consisted of the classroom’s rows and, therefore, represented only five or six students per group. You explored examples from your students’ stories and asked whether the passages would be stronger or weaker with dialogue. I applaud your posting of the investigatory questions on the tables at each student’s chair. You also provide good *wait-time* periods for students to ponder your questions and come up with responses.

In cultivating effective small group instruction, be sure that each and every student contributes in some way to the discussion that is taking place. Don’t let anyone “off the hook.” This is especially important for the shy, reluctant learner who needs a gentle nudge to participate. Also use small group learning to help students with the modeling process. You had time to let students do some writing within the small group and share it with their peers. I would encourage you to look for similar opportunities in the future. Finally, don’t put too many things on the small group plate. In a couple of your sessions, you also talked about the use of descriptive words in writing. Why not just concentrate on the aspects of dialogue and give students the opportunity to create and digest that concept? Save descriptive words for another small group study.

By the way, it’s important to note that the class members, when not in small group sessions, remained remarkably on task. That’s great!! Your time management of the groups was also good. Everyone got equal time with you and got an eraser!!

You have made good progress in the first half of your student teaching experience. Your classroom presence has improved greatly and you show confidence in your instructional delivery and interaction with students. Your classroom management skills have also improved, and students seem to understand your expectations of them. Your reflections of October 27 confirm that you can see your own growth as a teacher which is important. I’m also very pleased that you have embraced working with students and their families outside of the classroom sphere. Those are critical experiences as well. I look forward to visiting your classes again on November 14.