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Tools for Developing Teachers & Teaching

Introduction

Seven Tools for Developing Teachers and Teaching is a set of practices for providing growth evoking, non-evaluative feedback and coaching to teachers. *Seven Tools* is designed to be used by administrators, instructional coaches, consultants, peers, or anyone who seeks to develop teachers and teaching. Think of *Seven Tools* as a toolbox, with each tool uniquely designed for a specific situation, but not useful for all situations. Job-embedded professional development featuring training in *Seven Tools* is available as a part of the *Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory* (SOCL).

The Seven Tools

1. 30 Second Feedback
2. 5 Minute Feedback
3. Reflective Planning
4. Positive Reinforcement Coaching
5. Instructional Coaching
6. Small Group Coaching
7. Teaching Studies

Tool 1: 30 Second Feedback

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Quick Description... A short burst of positive reinforcement that links a specific teaching practice to a specific learning outcome.

Purpose/Rationale: 30 second feedback seeks to deliver a short, but meaningful, bit of positive reinforcement based on a walk-through or short observation. This tool's effectiveness is based on the observer's ability to be specific in describing the short episode of teaching and the subsequent learning effect. 30 second feedback is often delivered in an informal fashion— in the hallway, on the way to the cafeteria, etc.

Intended Effect: 30 second feedback serves as a quick affirmation of a specific aspect of a teacher's practice. It is a professional compliment. It focuses attention on the "nuts and bolts" of teaching. It portrays the provider as a keen observer of the teaching-learning process.

When to and when not to: Use 30 second feedback for positive messages only, not for critique or correction. This tool is best used with brief observations, not lengthy ones.

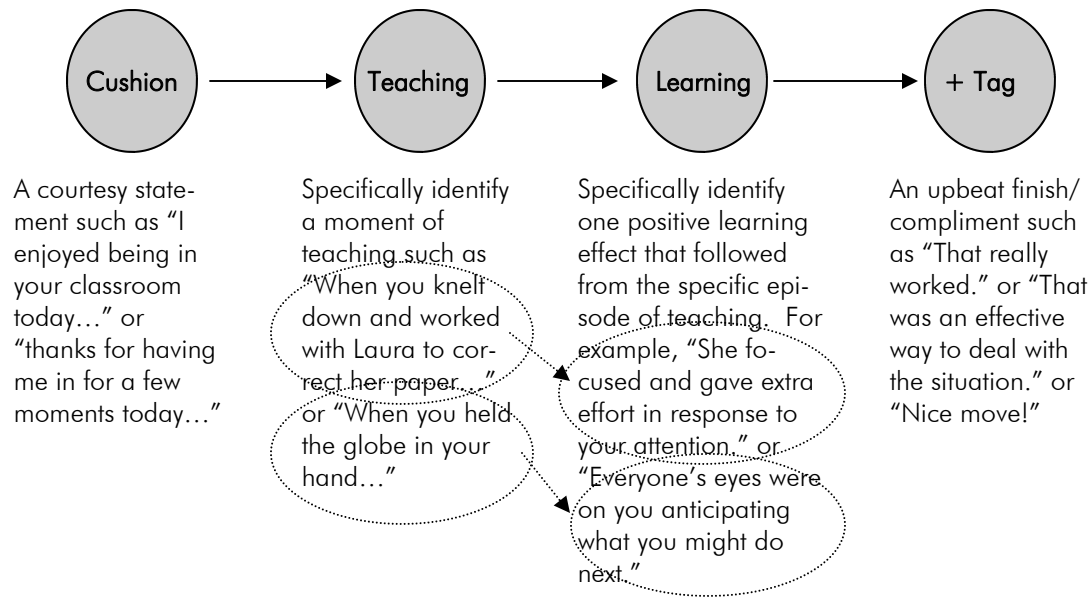
Notes: 30 Second Feedback is also very effective when provided in written form. Avoid complimenting the teacher personally ("you're such a good teacher...") or offering personal affirmation ("I really like it when you..."). Instead affirm the teaching decision and it's positive effect on learning ("When you did this... the effect was this...").

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Tool 1: 30 Second Feedback, cont'd.

Outline: Cushion → Teaching → Learning → + Tag



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Tool 2: 5 Minute Feedback

Quick Description... A brief feedback conversation that identifies a specific teaching practice, links the practice to a principle of learning, describes the effect on learning and learners, and engages the teacher in a short dialog affirming the feedback.

Purpose/Rationale: 5 Minute Feedback seeks to engage the teacher in a short, interactive analysis of a specific episode of instruction. 5 minute feedback supports the teacher's ability to see relevant patterns of effective practice, not just individual episodes of effective practice. 5 Minute Feedback is designed to follow a brief observation or walk through. This tool's effectiveness is based on the observer's ability to link an episode of teaching, a principle of learning (a pattern), and the subsequent learning effect. 5 Minute Feedback is often delivered in an informal fashion— in the hallway, sitting in the workroom, at the whiteboard, etc.

Intended Effect: 5 Minute Feedback should recognize an effective practice and link it to a broader pattern (principle of learning). It serves as a link between theory and practice. It focuses attention not only on the "nuts and bolts" of a teaching episode, but also on the "theory at work." It portrays the provider as a keen observer of teaching-learning and an able recognizer of effective instructional patterns.

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Developing
The Artisan
teacher

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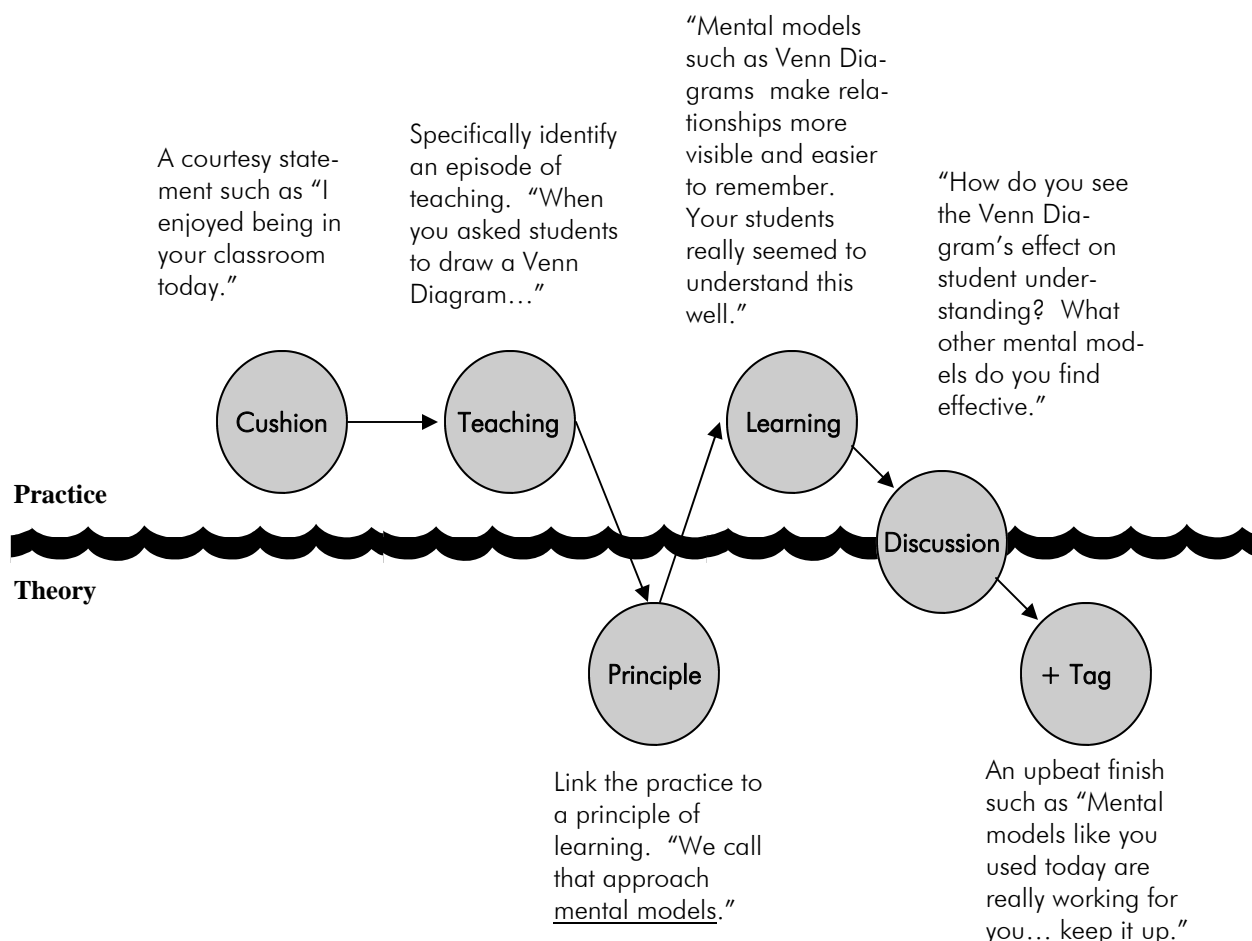
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Tool 2: 5 Minute Feedback, cont'd.

When to and when not to: Use 5 minute feedback following short to medium length observations. 5 minute feedback is particularly effective as a job-embedded follow-up to a staff development session where a specific principle of learning is examined. It is best not to use 5 minute feedback for advanced or complex analysis, or to provide feedback on teaching episodes that employ several principles of learning at once.

Notes: 5 minute feedback can be used as an affirmation of an effective teaching practice or as a way to illustrate a "missed opportunity." A sketch or diagram of the connections among practice, theory, and effect is helpful for clarity.

Outline: Cushion → Teaching → Principle → Learning → Dialog → +Tag



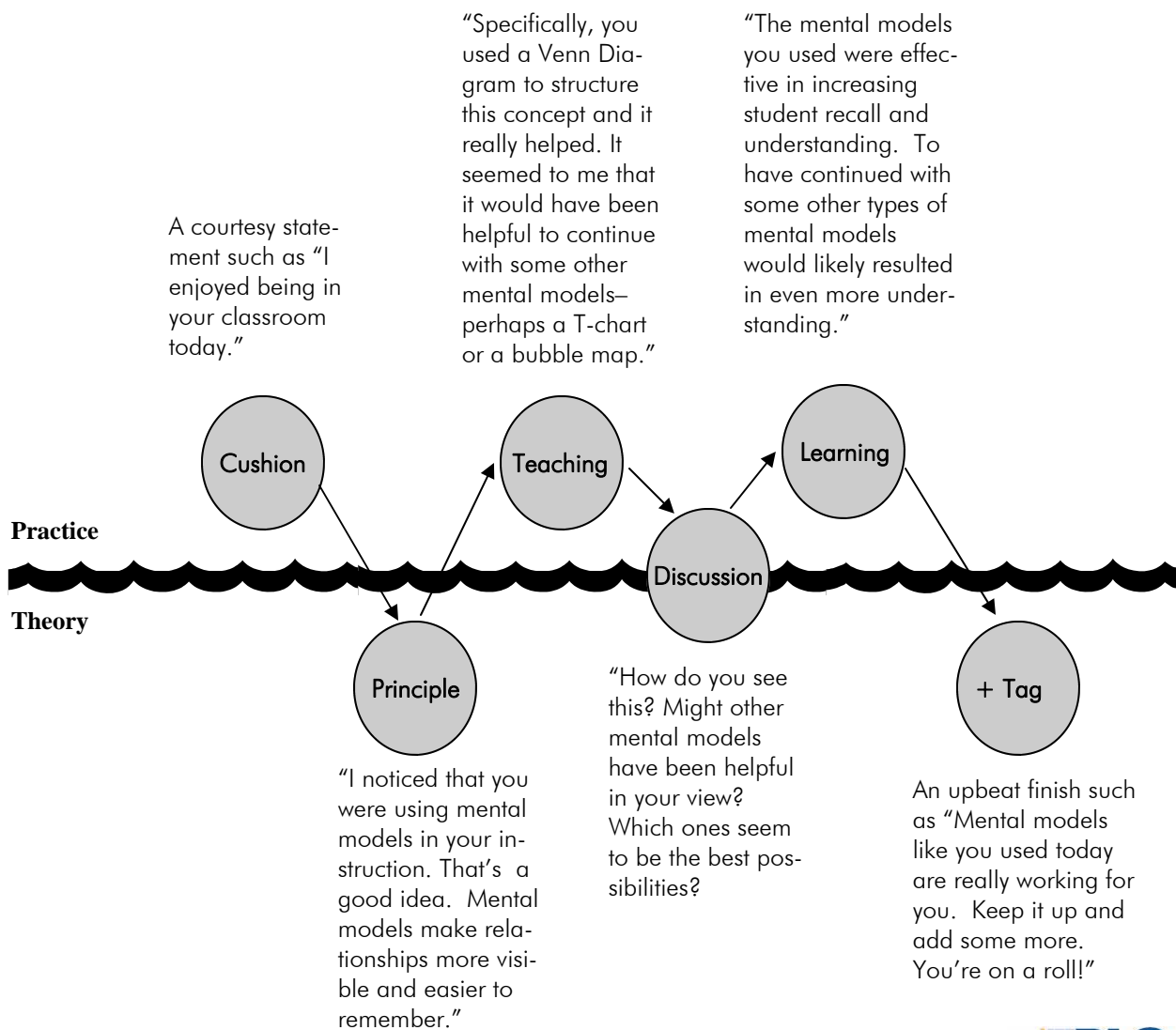
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Tool 2: 5 Minute Feedback, cont'd.

Notes: 5 minute feedback can also be used to illustrate a “missed opportunity.” A missed opportunity is not a mistake. It is an episode of teaching that could have been even more effective by “going farther or deeper” in a direction the teacher was already headed. Below is an outline of how 5 minute feedback for a missed opportunity is slightly different. Notice that the principle is identified prior to the teaching practice.

Outline: Cushion → Principle → Teaching → Dialog → Learning → +Tag



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Tool 3: Reflective Planning

Quick Description: A pre-conference of sorts, Reflective Planning seeks to engage the teacher in a brief “think ahead” toward an upcoming lesson. The coach asks open-ended questions inviting the teacher to think about specific goals for the upcoming lesson, devise student activities and experiences most likely to produce the desired learning, and imagine assessment cues that will indicate mastery.

Purpose/Rationale: To proactively improve a lesson through a session of facilitated thinking/planning that serves to sharpen goals, align activities, and clarify assessments.

Intended Effect: To provide an opportunity for a teacher to think ahead to an upcoming lesson in a deeper, different, or enhanced way.

When to and when not to: The more accomplished the teacher, the richer the reflective conversation is likely to be. Therefore, reflective planning is an excellent tool for working with peak performers. Reflective planning should not be used to discuss lessons that are imminent. An interim of 2-5 days between the coaching session and the lesson is optimal. Reflective planning is not effective for providing “guiding” feedback. It depends solely on the teacher’s own thinking, albeit facilitated thinking, so does not allow for providing suggestions.

Notes: Reflective planning can address goal clarification only, or goals + congruent activities, or goals + congruent activities + overt assessments. These three parts of the session are sequential. So, the goals discussion must come first, the activities discussion necessarily links activities to goals, and the assessment discussion comes last, linking back to goals also.

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Outline:

1. Introduction: *Greeting, set the tone, outline the session*
2. Using positive presupposition, invite the teacher to reflect upon goals for an upcoming lesson. *Listen for noun clarity (content) and verb clarity (level of thinking/doing). Probe for increased clarity, if appropriate.*
3. Using positive presupposition, invite the teacher to reflect upon planned teaching strategies / learner activities. *Listen for congruency between learner activities/experiences and the learning goals discussed earlier. Probe for increased clarity about this link, if appropriate.*

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Tool 3: Reflective Planning, cont'd.

Outline, cont'd.

4. Using positive presupposition, invite the teacher to reflect upon assessment “look—fors.” Listen for plans to elicit overt responses from students and plans for possible mid-course corrections. Probe for clarity, if appropriate.
5. If an observation is planned, invite teacher to direct the observation/data gathering for the observation.
6. Invite teacher to provide feedback on the coaching experience. Invite feedback on the process and the content of the session.

Tool 4: Positive Reinforcement Coaching

Quick Description: Following a 15-25 minute observation, the coach seeks to build upon the teacher’s use of effective practices by highlighting those practices, linking the practices to recurring patterns of instruction, and facilitating the teacher’s future use of these patterns of effective practice.

Purpose/Rationale: Positive Reinforcement Coaching seeks to develop instructional expertise by building on the teacher’s existing talents and strengths.

Intended Effect: Positive Reinforcement Coaching produces two important effects. First, the effective practice is likely to be used more frequently since it was reinforced. Second, future applications of the pattern will be more intentional and expert since the teacher will better understand how the pattern works to improve learning.

When to and when not to: Use positive reinforcement with competent, even excellent teachers. Be careful using positive reinforcement with very novice or incompetent teachers.

Notes: Positive reinforcement works best when a single practice of effective instruction is linked to a single pattern of effectiveness. Too much information decreases clarity and impact.

Outline:

1. Introduction: Greeting, set the tone, outline the session

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Positive Reinforcement Coaching, cont'd.

Outline, cont'd.:

2. Diagnosis: Ask a “narrow the focus” question to assess the teacher’s current level of understanding and prior knowledge.
3. Describe an example of effective teaching from the lesson. Be sure to identify the segment exactly so the teacher understands exactly what is being reinforced. Describe the observed benefits of this specific example.
4. Link the specific example to a specific pattern or principle of learning. Name the pattern, describe its essence, and clearly link the lesson example to the pattern.
5. Push toward transfer. Ask the teacher to think of future applications of this principle of learning to future lessons and to describe probable future benefits.
6. Invite teacher to provide feedback on the process and content of the coaching experience.

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Tool 5: Instructional Coaching

Quick Description: Instructional coaching is a proactive method for adding an element to a teacher’s practice or changing/improving an element of a teacher’s practice.

Purpose/Rationale: The purpose of instructional coaching is to effectively introduce new pedagogical practices and/or substitute effective practices for ineffective practices.

Intended Effect: Instructional coaching seeks to directly improve instruction by adding effective practices and/or substituting effective practices for ineffective ones.

When to and when not to: Instructional coaching should be used to teach fundamental, important concepts and practices, not to correct minor errors or suggest possible alternatives. Novice teachers typically expect and value this kind of direct instructional improvement. It is a more delicate process when used to improve the instruction of experienced staff who nonetheless need direct instructional intervention.

Notes: Instructional coaching is direct and straightforward, but it is not a negative process and can be used effectively with quite competent teachers.

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Instructional Coaching, cont'd.

Outline, cont'd.:

1. Introduction: Greeting, set the tone, outline the session
2. Diagnosis: Ask a "narrow the focus" question to understand the teacher's level of prior knowledge.
3. Identify the principle of teaching you wish to add to the teacher's repertoire. Teach this principle to the teacher.
 - Describe the essence of the principle and the probable benefits.
 - Provide an example from out of the classroom to illustrate.
 - Provide an example from inside the classroom to illustrate.
 - Ask the teacher to identify an application of this principle to a future lesson.
 - Schedule a time for the teacher to demonstrate an example of the principle.
 - Be clear on exactly what would qualify as a satisfactory demonstration.
4. Observe the teacher's demonstration and provide feedback. Engage the teacher in performance feedback for as many repetitions as necessary to reach mastery.
5. Push toward transfer. Ask the teacher to think of future applications of this principle of learning to future lessons and to describe probable future benefits.
6. Invite teacher to provide feedback on the coaching experience.

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Tool 6: Small Group Coaching

Quick Description: Small group coaching is, essentially, using Reflective Planning with a small group of teachers rather than an individual teacher.

Purpose/Rationale: Small group coaching increases efficiency since it affects multiple teacher at the same time. It also increases depth and quality of thought since it is a collaborative exercise instead of an individual one.

Intended Effect: To develop teachers and teaching through small group/collaborative experiences.

When to and when not to: The coaching structures best suited for small group applications are reflective planning and instructional coaching. The other coaching/feedback tools are specifically designed to be individual in nature and do not lend themselves to group settings.

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Small Group Coaching, cont'd.

When to and when not to... cont'd.

It is especially productive to use small group coaching to plan introductory lessons that several teachers will be teaching at the same time. For instance, all third grade teachers may be introducing long division at approximately the same time. This would be a good fit for a small group reflective planning session.

Notes: Small group coaching will often take at least twice as long as a corresponding individual session so plan accordingly. Also, it is a good idea to add a space to display thoughts and progress such as a white board or a flip chart. It is also productive to mix the levels of expertise in the small group. This way experienced teachers can model their thinking and planning for others.

Outline:

1. Introduction: Greeting, set the tone, outline the small group session.
2. Using positive presupposition, invite the teachers to reflect upon goals for an upcoming lesson. Listen for noun clarity (content) and verb clarity (level of thinking/doing). Probe for increased clarity, if appropriate. Record thoughts on a visual medium so all can see.
3. Using positive presupposition, invite the teachers to reflect upon possible teaching strategies/learner activities. Listen for congruency between learner activities/experiences and the learning goals discussed earlier. Probe for increased clarity about this link, if appropriate. Record thoughts on a visual medium so all can see.
4. Using positive presupposition, invite the teachers to reflect upon assessment “look—fors.” Listen for plans to elicit overt responses from students and plans for possible mid-course corrections. Probe for clarity, if appropriate. Record thoughts on a visual medium so all can see.
5. Invite teachers to provide feedback on the coaching experience. Invite feedback on both the process and the content of the session.

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Tool 7: Teaching Studies

Quick Description: Teaching Studies is a small group, facilitated “teachers observing teacher” experience. A Teaching Studies session involves 3-5 teachers observing another teacher’s classroom for 15-25 minutes. The observed teacher then joins the observing teachers and facilitator for a 20 minute facilitated discussion.

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Teaching Studies, cont'd.

Purpose/Rationale: Teaching studies builds on teachers' natural curiosity about the inner workings of others' classrooms. Both the observing teachers and the observed teacher benefit from the observation and skillfully facilitated discussion that follows.

Intended Effect: Teachers who participate in Teaching Studies are better able to recognize and understand important patterns of effective instruction by observing them in action in other's classrooms. The observed teacher is affirmed and also gains understanding as they participate in the ensuing discussions.

When to and when not to: Teaching Studies is a more effective experience if participating teachers share a common, professional language to describe effective teaching. Teaching Studies is more effective if the observed teacher is skillful and experienced.

Notes: Prior to the observation, it is important to communicate to the teacher observers that the observation is not a critique, an evaluation, or a judgment of the observed teacher's skills. It is an opportunity to learn and gain deeper insights into the teaching-learning process by observing it firsthand and discussing it with colleagues. Also, it is important not to begin the discussion phase of the experience until the observed teacher joins the group.

Outline:

1. Introduce the concept and brief the observer teachers on the upcoming experience. Remind them that this is not a critique, judgment, or evaluation. Prep the observers with some inside information on the classroom to be observed. Review with the observers some examples of relevant patterns of instruction they should expect to see. Remind the observers not to participate in the lesson but to observe it.
2. Accompany the group into the observed teacher's classroom and watch the action for 15-25 minutes. Until Teaching Studies is a more common occurrence, ask the observers to make mental notes only... nothing written.
3. Convene the observing teachers and the observed teacher around a round table and facilitate the discussion around these three prompts.
 - A. What patterns of effective instruction did you observe? Elaborate on the cause-effect relationships between the teaching practice and the learning that occurred as a result.
 - B. What questions do you have for the teacher on the lesson, content, students, context, next steps, etc.
 - C. How might you apply any of the instructional patterns or practices in your own classroom?
4. Follow-up on any relevant development opportunities with individual participants.

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