

TO: *OK* Will Havill

FROM: Glenn Solowiej, Principal
Traverse City East Middle School

CC: Jon Moore, Supervising Teacher
Traverse City East Middle School

RE: Observation
First Period

DATE: December 7, 2009



The twenty-nine seventh graders were immediately engaged in a warm up that challenged them to access the periodic table of elements to solve riddles. You monitored by coming within close proximity to each table and prodded and encouraged appropriately.

The class was invited to share responses to the warm up challenge. You selected a student to share his/her response by picking a student with a hand raised. All students appeared engaged in the activity. My challenge to you is to guarantee that warm-ups are directly related to a previously taught concept (review) or as a pre-teaching activity. They should NEVER be an isolated activity with simply science content. Today's warm-up was well connected to the day's key lesson.

Please re-evaluate your method of selecting a student to contribute or read from a selection. By opting to select a student with a hand raised you are typically engaging 4% of your class. By asking a well-developed question, providing adequate think time, and then selecting a student randomly - without hand in the air, you are effectively engaging 100% of your students as all will be prepared with a response or knowing where to read from.

The day's agenda is clearly posted on the white board. Students appeared familiar with routines and expectations. Behavior was constructive and focused. I appreciate the presence you maintain in common areas during passing time and prior to school starting. You clearly embrace site initiatives and participate professionally (examples: Professional Learning Communities).

The class was asked to read a selection. All students responded to the directive. Was the purpose for reading this clearly communicated prior to addressing the task at hand? After reading, students were invited to respond to questions. Again, by selecting a student with a hand raised you fail to optimize the power of your question. Think...when you ask for the characteristics of a metal...don't you really want all students ready and prepared to grab the marker and be able to record his/her answer on the board? Here is the suggested process that would increase engagement:

1. Ask question

2. Allow for adequate think time or time for collaboration
3. Select a student by random.

The observations shared by students were tops. You succeeded in taking the reading selection and “boiling it down” to essential information. Consider using science to support dynamic reading for information skills (example: use a highlighter to identify key information).

Your management style appears to allow for blurting out when a student is so inclined. While not detrimental to the learning process...it allows for your more out-going students to dominate.

Rather than holding up a piece of paper and asking students to find it/retrieve it, you may opt to employ the document cam. This process would promote focus and minimize the disruption of transition time.

You appear quite capable regarding content. You know your “stuff”. Concentrate on effective instructional practices that engage a higher percentage of students and challenge deeper thinking. An example of putting a higher level of responsibility for learning in the hands of students would be when you took the job on of summarizing the work written by students on the board. You may have opted to allow teams a time to sort out the characteristics and be prepared to point to an example in the room or summarize the information in each of the columns. After allowing the time to collaborate, you would have been confident that each student in the room could do what was asked of them (summarize). My expectation is for 100% of the students to be engaged 100% of the time. In an interview I would be interested in learning what your strategies are for such a requirement.

During the time allocated for students to work, students appeared intent on completing the assignment. You monitor effectively. You demonstrate a level of comfort with the age group and employ a sense of humor which assists you in establishing a safe environment. A couple students needed some intervention from you and they were not disappointed. Due to your monitoring, you sensed the need to re-communicate directions and did so. Nice job.

The students were dismissed after being warned a few times of the remaining minutes of class. I would suggest that prior to dismissal you ALWAYS include an opportunity to process and assimilate or summarize the day’s events.