Classroom Observation

The subject of the observation is Ms. Ruano, a 5th grade science and math teacher. She is a founding teacher and has been with the school for 13 years. The pre-observation conference was held on 2/25. Ms. Ruano, Mr. Campos and I met in her classroom to conduct the pre-observation conference. I attempted to introduce the *Student Observation Protocol: Focus Point* as a tool for structuring the classroom observation. Mr. Campos and I co-facilitated the meeting. He asked Ms. Ruana to tell us about her lesson. Ms. Ruano explained that she was doing a making sense activity with the students for the Weather unit. “Making sense” is a term used from the UCLA Lab School Critical Thinking Institute and is part of the inquiry cycle. The students would be working in groups, researching a type of cloud and the weather that is associated with that particular cloud. This lesson/activity is at the beginning of their unit of study.

 The rationale for the observation was to observe the students who are at an ELD level 2, 3 or 4 to determine their level of engagement. When I asked Ms. Ruano what she would like me to look for or observe, she replied, “how to keep the students engaged that don’t participate, particularly the ELD 2, 3 and 4s.” I used this as the guiding question for the observation. Although I did not get the opportunity to formally present the *Student Observation Protocol: Focus Point* or inquire as to what tool she would like to use, I attempted to still use the protocol as a guide. It appeared to me that the teachers in general, and this one in particular, are quite comfortable and familiar with being observed. Coaches, visiting teachers, and Mr. Campos all observe them quite frequently. Therefore, an official tool that was not familiar to them seemed inappropriate or intrusive for the observation. I followed the lead of my supervisor and the teacher who was being observed and used an informal note taking as the observation tool. I planned to just write down what I saw happening in the classroom.

 The classroom observation was conducted on 2/26 from 10:50-11:20 am. Mr. Campos, my supervisor (and hers as well), attended the observation with me. The students were busy working in groups, making different types of clouds. Mr. Campos and I walked around the room and visited with different groups. I sat with 3 different groups for about 8-10 minutes, observed and asked questions. I documented the observation by making notes of some of the things that I saw happening. I attempted to write with as little judgment as possible.

Here are a few of my notes:

1. The students could state the task they were working on using academic language (proper names of clouds)
2. The materials in the room are easily accessible, students choose what materials they want to make their clouds. Student input on how to make clouds as well.
3. Student choice- students chose their groups, their clouds, the materials, etc.
4. Off task behavior- I saw very few students “off task” or not engaged. The only “off task behavior” if you can call it that was about decision-making and group conflict. All the students were highly engaged with the activity. In the 3 groups that I observed, there were at least one or more students who were visibly upset. When I asked them what was going on, their responses indicated frustration with not being able to participate in the assignment the way they wanted to. For example, one girl didn’t like the group’s decision about the way they were making the cloud.

We also looked at student work as the groups were constructing their clouds. Each group was making a cloud. They were each assigned a different type of cloud. They needed to choose materials to construct the cloud, co-construct the cloud and then identify some of the cloud’s particular characteristics, including what level of elevation one would typically find the cloud. All the groups had a “cloud information sheet” that they were using to assist them. Each group that I observed was able to accurately construct a cloud based on the type that was assigned to them. The unit loosely resembles a FOSS unit that I have taught many times and am quite familiar with.

After the lesson, Mr. Campos and I met with Ms. Ruano during her lunch period to debrief. Mr. Campos began the debriefing by thanking Ms. Ruano for allowing us to observe and participating in the process. We both assured her that the observation was non-evaluative and that the purpose was to improve student learning and to be of service to her. Again, in an attempt to use the Student Observation Protocol, I asked her “what did you notice about the level of engagement of your students with an ELD level of 2, 3 and 4?” She responded by saying that she thought the lesson went really well and that all the students were engaged. Mr. Campos asked her to say more about what went well. She talked briefly about what went well. I asked her if she wanted me to share my observations based on the focus question. She said yes, and so I did. I also shared with her a few questions that I had based on the focus questions. Some of the questions were:

* How are the groups formed?
* Can students do the same task in pairs or trios? (thinking about the students who were frustrated because they wanted to participate more)
* Is there another task or job that one or two of them could do (assuming they are working in larger groups) that would supplement the learning experience?

Overall, the experience was positive. Ms. Ruano was very welcoming and seemed genuinely open to the experience. It is clear to me that there is a strong level of mutual respect between the teachers and Mr. Campos. They each highly value each others input. In that sense, I learned a lot from just observing his interactions and relationship with his teachers. However, I do wish that my observation could have been more meaningful in terms of actually helping a teacher improve student learning. Perhaps, that is an ambitious goal for just one observation. Nonetheless, if I were to do it again, I would try to select a teacher that might want or need support. One of the challenges with this assignment is that because I am not actually an employee of PLN, it was difficult for me to do the observation alone. It may have been a different experience if I were observing a colleague versus someone I barely know. I did find it very helpful to use an observation protocol when observing classrooms because it helps to focus the observation and let the teacher know exactly what is being observed (ex., students and student work versus her). This assignment may not have been the most effective in terms of implementation but it was still a great learning experience.