**Mock Observation: 1st observation discussion based class**

**Pre-Observation Conference:**

Teacher invited me to attend her literature course for the purpose of a peer observation. In a pre-observation conference Teacher conveyed to me that I would be observing a discussion based class. She further emphasized that her goal for the class was to foster a depth to the discussion while still covering the full extent of the content relevant to the reading. She also expressed concern with the engagement of her students and asked me to provide feedback on eye-contact and student involvement. A global theme of the institution is a focus on critical thinking. As such, I informed Teacher that I would be evaluating her effectiveness relative to critical thinking skills as well as the college-wide standards for excellence in teaching provided below.

**College Standards**

6.1.2 In broad terms excellence in teaching is characterized by:

6.1.2.1 A thorough and current command of the subject matter, teaching techniques and

methodologies of the disciplines one teaches.

6.1.2.2 Sound course design and delivery in all teaching assignments – whether program or

General Studies, introductory or advanced offerings — as evident in clear learning goals

and expectations, content reflecting the best available scholarship or artistic practices, and

teaching techniques aimed at student learning.

6.1.2.3. The ability to organize course material and to communicate this information

effectively. The development of a comprehensive syllabus for each course taught,

including expectations, grading and attendance policies, and the timely provision of copies

to students.

6.1.2.4 Excellence in teaching also entails respect for students as members of the Stockton

academic community, the effective response to student questions, and the timely evaluation

of and feedback to students.

6.1.3 Where appropriate, additional measures of teaching excellence are:

6.1.3.1 Ability to use technology in teaching.

6.1.3.2 The capacity to relate the subject matter to other fields of knowledge.

6.1.3.3 Seeking opportunities outside the classroom to enhance student learning of the subject

matter.

**Pre-Class Observations:**

I arrived at the class just as the discussion was beginning; therefore, I cannot comment on how Teacher presented the discussion topic; however, from the context of observing the discussion, it appeared as though the students were guided to discuss a particular section of an assigned reading and that the book as a whole had not yet been completed.

The students’ desks were arranged in a circle with Teacher’s desk a part of the circle; her back was to me during the discussion. The students each had a copy of the book on their desk or open in their hands. Teacher had a copy of the book and had a notebook opened on her desk that she used to record student responses. Teacher did not work off of any notes. (6.1.2.1)

**Class Content:**

Teacher began the lesson by reminding students of discussion etiquette, e.g. everyone cannot speak at once and listen and respond to classmates’ comments. She further reminded students that she would be taking notes on the discussion so the requested etiquette was important for her ability to keep track of everything that was said. (6.1.2.3) Teacher referred back to these instructions two more times during the lesson, when students began to over-speak each other.

At first, the students appear reticent about participating in the early part of the discussion. Several students are fidgeting or fanning themselves and more than half the students are leaning their faces on their hands. Teacher provided a question prompt which forced students to reference their books. Next, Teacher directed a specific question to a particularly fidgety student. These prompts changed the body language of the entire class and drew-in the uneasy student. (This student continued to be an active part of the discussion throughout the class.) (6.1.2.2)

Teacher continued to guide the discussion using prompting questions and also encouraged students to volunteer their own questions for the class to discuss. This she accomplished by asking more general questions to specific students, e.g. “Was there anything that you have questions about in this section?” Student questions and responses displayed an interest in the reading assignment and a depth to their understanding. Students consistently referenced page numbers in both their questions and responses. Students were particularly engaged by students’ questions to each other, as they precipitated more student to student interaction and longer response chains, i.e. more than one response. (6.1.2.4) Teacher allowed silences within the discussion and did not rush to fill them with additional questions. Teacher’s use of follow up questions guided students to conclusions without giving them an immediate answer. Teacher asked students to make inferences based on their reading related to future content in the text. One student introduced the term foreshadowing, and Teacher stepped in to clarify term and emphasize its relevance within the broader literary discussion. Teacher asked one student to help with a German pronunciation; several students and Teacher applauded the student’s ability to add culturally to the class discussion. (6.1.2.4)

Teacher used example of a cigarette/olive branch to discuss metaphor. Teacher (arguably) missed an opportunity to use technology to explore why an olive branch represents peace. She did direct a student to “look it up,” but she did not revisit the query. Teacher used this same example to discuss the significance of the cigarette to the father/daughter relationship. She then asked students to reflect on their own relationships for a mirroring experience, sharing an example from her own childhood.

Teacher promoted critical thinking skills throughout the discussion. One example involving the color “yellow” stands out. She asked students if they saw any reason why “yellow” was used. This led to a discussion of the “yellow star” which was a symbol of oppression in Nazi Germany. (Institutional Goal)

Teacher attended to student questions throughout the discussion without directly influencing their read with her own opinions. (6.1.2.4) She left doubt as to the validity of her own conclusions, frequently saying, “Maybe not” or “I might be wrong.” Teacher used techniques to relate to her students on their level. For example, she said, “I think X, but that might be because I really like Hans.” (6.1.2.4) Students were particularly responsive to this technique.

Teacher gave non-verbal and verbal clues that the class was ending, but failed to make use of any concluding remarks. Teacher was interrupted by the bell while segueing to an important concept (FOIL). Teacher spoke over students preparing to leave to say they will continue the discussion during the next class and instructing the students to complete the next assignment.

**Positives:**

* Teacher moderated a discussion that was both broad (spanning a significant portion of the text) and deep (discussing fairly sophisticated themes) in content. (Teacher Goal)
* Teacher navigated difficult and sensitive themes with ease. Most notably a discussion of race related to Nazi ideology and, to a lesser extent, the dangers of smoking. In the case of the later, Teacher used well placed humor to advantage. (6.1.2.4)
* Teacher was able to make several references to literary terms and structure, e.g. Foreshadowing, Inference, Symbolism, and Metaphor. (6.1.2.1 – 6.1.2.3)
* Teacher emphasized connections between literature and personal experience, encouraging students to relate themes to their own life experiences. (6.1.2.4)
* Teacher promoted critical thinking skills by encouraging reflection and by asking students to relate the material to their own life. This was seen most notably in the discussion of the cigarette/olive branch. (Institutional Goal)

**Suggestions:**

* To encourage eye contact, Teacher could expand the rules for discussion etiquette; e.g. when you respond to a question you should look at the person who asked the question. (Teacher Concern 1)
* Teacher should pay attention to vocal clues that lead students to know the expected answer. Teacher would also do well to prompt with more open-ended questions that require greater response than Yes/No. (Teacher Goal 1)
* Teacher should be cognizant of students who are left out of the conversation. The majority of student input came from the 4 or 5 students that directly faced the teacher. Students who were immediately next to the teacher answered rarely or never. Sensitivity to room dynamic will help to encourage full class participation. (Teacher Concern 2)